

U.N. approves new Iraqi humanitarian purchases

BAGHDAD (R) — The United Nations has approved Iraq's first humanitarian purchases under the third phase of its oil-for-food deal, a U.N. official in Baghdad said on Tuesday. Eric Falt, spokesman for the U.N. humanitarian coordinator in Iraq, said 12 contracts had been approved just five weeks after Baghdad resumed oil exports under the accord. Iraq has complained that food and medicine purchases under the agreement, which allows it to sell \$2 billion worth of oil every six months, had been consistently delayed by U.S. and British representatives on the U.N. Sanctions Committee. Mr. Falt said that for the first time, the contracts were approved before funds had become available from oil exports. U.N. Secretary-General Kofi Annan has proposed that the oil-for-food deal be more than doubled to \$5.26 billion every six months.

Jordan Times

An independent Arab political daily published by the Jordan Press Foundation
جوردان تايمز يومية سياسية مستقلة عن المؤسسة الصحفية الأردنية «الراي»

Saudi prince gives Boeing 727 to PNA

GAZA CITY (AFP) — Saudi Prince Walid Ben Talal presented a Boeing 727 passenger jet to Palestinian President Yasser Arafat Tuesday on the first visit by Prince Walid, chairman of the Kingdom Holding Company and a member of the Saudi royal family to the Palestinian autonomous areas. The prince donated the jet to the Palestinian autonomous areas, which currently operates two small Fokker jets out of an airfield in the Egyptian Sinai city of Al Arish. The opening of a Palestinian airport in the Gaza Strip has been blocked by disagreements with Israel over security at the facility. Prince Walid and Mr. Arafat were scheduled to tour Gaza City construction projects in which the prince has heavily invested. They were also to help lay the cornerstones for a special school for children suffering from Down Syndrome for which Prince Walid contributed \$400,000, officials said.

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Time is running out for Iraq — Prince Hassan Santer: Israel's hardline policies affecting economic development throughout region

By Ghaila Alul
Jordan Times Staff Reporter

AMMAN — His Royal Highness Crown Prince Hassan said Tuesday that the time is running out for Iraq and that Baghdad has to bear the consequences if it does not fully comply with United Nations resolutions. "Time is ticking and we do not have much time left to contain the recurrence of the use of force," said the Crown Prince after a meeting with the European Commission (EC) President Jacques Santer who was in Jordan as part of a regional tour to boost the European Union's role in the Middle East peace

process. At a joint press conference with President Santer, the Crown Prince said a possible strike on Iraq would have major repercussions on the Kingdom and other countries in the region. "The cost of war is considered on human terms... the possibility of displaced refugees, the breakdown of infrastructure, and the shortage of oil supplies all are issues of deep concern and the sense of déjà-vu in 1990 does not make it any better." He was referring to the 1.5 million refugees and expatriates who fled from Iraq and Kuwait to Jordan after the 1991 Gulf war.

"Jordan was the most affected country after Kuwait," he said. The Crown Prince also reiterated Jordan's position not to open its borders for any refugees coming from Iraq. The Kingdom has made an agreement with the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) and other international agencies to help the refugees, but only on the Iraqi side of the border. A possible military strike on Baghdad would also affect the incoming oil supplies to the Kingdom since Iraq is Jordan's sole crude oil supplier, Prince Hassan said. "Iraqi oil supplies are our

only source at the present time. To talk about building infrastructure for new pipelines from other countries is going to take a lot of time and cost a lot of money. Prince Hassan said that the Middle East is the only region that does not have a conflict resolution centre which would provide a mechanism to solve regional problems. He also said that in the event of a military confrontation with Iraq, the Middle East peace process will be adversely affected. "It will be very difficult to further the peace process in the fall out of a military confrontation," the Crown Prince said.

The latest stand-off between Iraq and the U.N. followed Iraq's refusal to allow inspectors from the U.N. Special Commission (UNSCOM) to enter presidential palaces and compounds, saying that such inspections infringe on Baghdad's sovereignty, and amount to a form of humiliation. Answering reporters on whether Jordan should expect help from the EU in the aftermath of a military strike on Iraq, President Santer said the European Union understands the "particularity of Jordan's economic and demographic relations with Iraq, expressing the EU's willingness to



His Majesty King Hussein meets with Prime Minister Abdul Salam Majali and other ministers at the prime ministry Tuesday, one day after his return back home from a medical trip to the U.K. (Photo by Yousef Allam)

King on way to full recovery

AMMAN (J.T.) — His Majesty King Hussein Tuesday reassured Jordanians that he was on the way to full recovery from the micro-organism that has agitated his lymph glands and caused occasional fever, weight loss and severe exhaustion. He told journalists following a meeting he held with Prime Minister Abdul Salam Majali at the prime ministry that he was on a six-week course of two kinds of antibiotic medi-

cines in order to ensure full recovery. King Hussein who went to London towards the end of last month to have rest and continue medical treatment said also that he contracted a severe flu for which he was forced to receive vaccination. Asked about precautionary measures which Jordan was taking in case of a military strike against Iraq, he said that "the government has undertaken all the necessary measures. All the

measures are sound and it is hoped that matters will be moving in the right direction." At the meeting with the prime minister, which was attended by Deputy Prime Ministers Abdullah Ensour and Jawad Anani as well as Minister of State for Prime Ministry Affairs Sadeeddin Juma'a, a general review was made of the precautionary measures taken by the government in the face of any eventuality arising from the U.N.-Iraq crisis.

Clinton calls on Saddam to back down; Iraq denies concessions Cohen welcomes 'real coalition' against Iraq; China warns against U.S. 'bullying' Annan: Iraqi leaders painted themselves in a corner, but I think we should not insist on humiliating them

Combined agency dispatches

U.S. PRESIDENT Bill Clinton urged Iraqi President Saddam Hussein Tuesday to seek a peaceful solution to the crisis over weapons inspections and allow U.N. monitors to get back to work. "I hope we can avoid the use of force," Mr. Clinton said at a White House event on the economy. "The choice is up to Saddam Hussein." "Let the weapons inspectors back on the job with free and unfettered access," Mr. Clinton said. He reiterated warnings that if President Hussein did not stop blocking inspections that are mandated under U.N. resolutions, "we must be prepared to act."

Iraqi Foreign Minister Mohammad Said Al Sahhaf told the Al Jazeera satellite station from Syria that comments by Arab League Secretary-General Esmat Abdul Meguid reporting that Iraq was prepared to open up 68 presidential sites were wrong. "I believe that what has been attributed to the Arab League secretary-general is inaccurate. Iraq has not agreed on the inspection of any sovereign site at all and will not agree," Mr. Sahhaf said. The Gulf state of Qatar distanced itself on Tuesday from U.S. contingency plans to attack Iraq, saying that Washington had made its arrangements with other Gulf states and that Qatar hoped for a peaceful solution. "The Gulf Cooperation Council states, including Qatar, do not welcome and do not want to see Iraq being hit and bombed again. We

care for the Iraqi people," Foreign Minister Sheikh Hamad Ben Jassim Ben Jabr Al Thani told a news conference. The minister, speaking alongside visiting U.S. Defence Secretary William Cohen, did not rule out a Qatari role in a U.S. operation but he declined to back the U.S. view that military action must follow if President Hussein does not give full access to U.N. weapons inspectors. Mr. Cohen, now on the fifth stop of a six-nation Gulf tour, said Qatar and the Gulf Arab states all agreed that the Iraqi president should bear full responsibility for the consequences if he does not comply with U.N. resolutions on the inspections. Earlier Tuesday, Mr. Cohen welcomed the "real coalition" being assembled against Iraq but denied war fever has gripped the Pentagon. "This is a real coalition," Mr. Cohen told reporters. "We welcome what the Australians have said and

pledged, and what the Canadians have said as well," added the defence secretary, referring to the two countries' support for U.S. military preparations. Canada said it would back the U.S. military threat, while Australia offered to deploy an elite regiment. "If it does become necessary for a United States-led coalition to use force then Australia has decided it will make a contribution to that effort," Australian Prime Minister John Howard told reporters after a cabinet meeting, adding: "We believe it would become regrettably necessary for that force to be used." Canada said Tuesday it would supply a warship and two Hercules transport planes as well as 300 to 400 troops to support a U.S. military strike against Iraq. The United States formally requested assistance Tuesday from Australia's neighbour New Zealand. Foreign Minister Don McKinnon said New Zealand could offer trans-

port and medical support if military action was taken against Iraq, similar to the assistance given during Operation Desert Storm in the 1991 Gulf war. The offers followed an announcement by U.S. Secretary of State Madeleine Albright that Poland, the Czech Republic and Hungary were also backing the tough stand of the United States. The U.S. administration turned to other friends for military backing after the refusal of key Arab ally Saudi Arabia to allow U.S. strikes on Iraq from its territory. Britain and Germany have already sided with Washing-

ton in arguing that force may be used to coerce Iraq to open up presidential sites to U.N. arms inspectors. However, U.N. Secretary General Kofi Annan cautioned against military action against Iraq and said the United States and its allies should avoid "humiliating" the country. In a British Broadcasting Corporation interview aired Tuesday, Mr. Annan said that President Hussein should understand that U.N. Security Council's resolutions were "serious," but cautioned against military action. Mr. Annan said Iraq's

Government bans rallies

AMMAN (J.T.) — The Government "will not allow any marches or movement under any slogan and for any reason anywhere in the Kingdom at these critical circumstances and this crucial stage which the country is passing through," Interior Minister Nathir Rashid said in a statement Tuesday. According to the statement, carried by the Jordan News Agency, Petra, Mr. Rashid said the government measures are aimed at safeguarding the country and preventing any "attempt by those harbouring ill-intentions against this country to infiltrate

into our ranks. "The government, while reiterating its adherence to democracy and respect for the freedom of expression and opinion, would like to stress that the critical circumstances and crucial stage warrant that all of us maintain the highest degree of discipline, and responsibility and not to be carried away with sentimental calls and incitements which could cause harm to the nation, and yield no practical benefit to the cause for which the [rallies are] being organised," Mr. Rashid said. Earlier on Tuesday, Amman Governor Tala't

Nawaiseh decided to ban all marches or processions in the capital, warning that strict security measures will be enforced to ensure security, order and safety of citizens. Petra said. According to the decision by Mr. Nawaiseh, gatherings or rallies held anywhere in the capital with the purpose of organising marches will be viewed as illegal. Mr. Nawaiseh's decision came in response to a request by opposition parties seeking to organise a march after Friday prayer from the Hussein Mosque to Al Hashemiyyah Square in downtown Amman in support for Iraq.

Weeklies to file compensation lawsuit against government

By Alia Shukri Hamzeh
Special to the Jordan Times

AMMAN — Several Jordanian weeklies said on Tuesday they were preparing to sue the government for financial compensation for losses incurred by the enforcement of temporary revisions to the press law that forced them to shut down for months. The weeklies were encouraged by a High Court ruling on Jan. 26 that annulled the May revisions for being unconstitutional. Musa Keilani, Al Urdun weekly chief editor, said he was preparing two lawsuits against Minister of State for Information Affairs Samir Mutawi demanding financial compensation between JD85,000-90,000. "The first lawsuit filed by me and the staff of the paper will be for compensation for losses incurred in the several months of closure," he told the Jordan Times. "The second will be filed for loss and damage worth JD10,000 caused to the paper's equipment that sat idle for months."

Al Urdun is one of the 13 weeklies banned last September by the government for failing to meet the 1997 press law amendments that were criticised at home and abroad for stifling freedom of expression. The May amendments introduced prohibitive capital requirements for the weeklies, tightened the list of topics that could not be covered, and stipulated harsh penalties for violations of the law. Dr. Keilani said his paper's first edition after the ban will hit newsstands in three weeks after completing preparations and getting official authorisation from the Cabinet to resume printing. Tajeddine Hroub, publisher of Al Bilad weekly that resumed publication yesterday, said losses incurred by Al Bilad and Hawadeth Al Sa'a reached JD250,000. The first edition of Hawadeth Al Sa'a after the court ruling was confiscated by police last week after the government claimed the ruling was not retroactive.

and that the weeklies needed new licences to resume publication. The government later reversed its stand. "We are seriously considering suing the government, our legal experts are working on two lawsuits," Mr. Hroub said. He added, however, "who will compensate us for our emotional loss which is much higher than the financial one." Nahed Hattar, chief editor of Al Mithaq weekly, also said his paper intends to go to court to seek JD33,000 in compensation. Nidal Mansour, the editor of Al Haddath, scheduled to resume publication within weeks, said his paper is not considering suing the government. "It would be better for both sides to relax and wait before taking any measures against each other," he said. The weeklies should focus on the resumption of publication and their content before seeking compensation, he said.

U.S. seeks decisions from Israelis, Palestinians

WASHINGTON (AFP) — U.S. mediators began a round of meetings Tuesday on urgent steps the United States is seeking from Israel and the Palestinians to salvage the ailing Middle East peace process. The U.S. coordinator for the Middle East, Dennis Ross, sat down with Israeli officials Danny Navch and Uzi Arad for talks that were to be followed up with similar discussions with Palestinian officials Saeb Erekat and Marwan Kanafani later in the day, U.S. State Department officials said. It was not clear whether the two delegations would meet with U.S. Secretary of State Madeleine Albright as State Department officials said such a meeting would depend on the results of the discussions. At a U.S. Senate hearing, Ms. Albright said that the sides were examining U.S. proposals for rebuilding the peace process

and noted that tensions with Iraq should not be allowed to interfere with that effort. "It is very important for them to make some decisions," she said at the hearing of the U.S. Senate Foreign Relations Committee. "We will proceed with the peace process because we believe it is important to do so," she said. Referring to the stand-off with Iraq over U.N. weapons inspections that the United States has threatened to resolve militarily, Ms. Albright said: "We cannot let the two interfere with each other." Ms. Albright last week said it was "decision-making" time in the Israeli-Palestinian peace process after her latest round of talks in the region failed to produce agreement on reviving the effort. "We must move the peace process forward now," she said in Cairo.

Iraq invites politicians to Baghdad

BAGHDAD (R) — Iraq issued an open invitation to foreign politicians on Tuesday to visit Baghdad and hear its side of the story in a row with the United Nations over weapons inspections, the Iraqi News Agency (INA) said. It said the invitation was extended by the foreign affairs bureau of Iraq's ruling Arab Socialist Baath Party to all political parties and personalities, both Arab and non-Arab. The speaker of Iraq's parliament, Saadoun Hammadi, also sent a separate invitation to eight British parliamentarians he said had rejected the use of force to settle the inspections row, the agency said. The global invitation was aimed at briefing "the parties and personalities on Iraq's position towards the current crisis which was manufactured by the United States," the agency quoted a Baath Party source as saying. It said the visitors would also see firsthand the effect of more than seven years of economic sanctions on Iraq, and could discuss the "dangers of the American threats of a new military aggression against Iraq and the negative repercussions and the shock to regional security."

Truce panel blames Israel for civilian death in south Lebanon

BEIRUT (AFP) — Israel was responsible for the death of a farmer in a bomb explosion and the wounding of two other civilians in shelling within the past week, a panel monitoring the south Lebanon ceasefire said Tuesday.

The international panel said in a statement that on "February 6, 1998 two side-bombs placed by Israeli forces or those cooperating with them exploded in a wadi [valley] near Majdel Zun, killing a farmer and two of his animals."

The panel's Lebanese representative said, according to the statement, that "the recurrence of such incidents showed intentional disregard by Israel

for civilian lives due to the fact that civilians passed through this area in the course of their normal activities."

"The random detonation mechanism of the explosive devices" also showed such disregard," he was cited as saying.

However, the panel's Israeli representative said in the statement that "since the Israeli forces or those cooperating with them did not detonate the side-bombs and that the devices were located in an open area used by Lebanese armed groups, the action did not constitute a violation."

But the monitoring group, which also includes representatives of France, Syria and the United States, said Israel and

those working with it "are responsible for the manner in which they use explosive devices."

The group said Israel committed itself in December to taking more steps to prevent random civilian casualties and requested that the Jewish state increase these measures.

Under the April 1996 ceasefire, Israel and the Lebanese Hizbollah militia agreed to avoid targeting civilians or launching attacks from civilian areas.

The panel also said that three mortar rounds fired by Israeli forces or their allies on Feb. 6 on Yater wounded a civilian and damaged three houses and an electrical network.

The group said: "Israel and those cooperating with it are responsible for the consequences of their firing mission."

However, the panel also urged "that additional measures be taken to ensure that civilian-populated areas will not be used as launching grounds for attacks by Lebanese armed groups in the future."

The group said that a shell fired by Israeli forces on Feb. 8 wounded a shepherd in an open area southwest of Yater but that "this injury was the unintentional result of a military clash between the two sides."



TWO HOUSES BULLDOZED: Israeli soldiers Tuesday stand near one of the two Palestinian houses knocked down by Israeli bulldozers in the West Bank town of Dahariya near Hebron. Nine people were living in the houses built without permits (AFP photo)

Israel preparing for conflict

OCCUPIED JERUSALEM (AFP) — Israel stepped up preparations for war with Iraq Tuesday, fuelling public anxiety over the possibility Saddam Hussein could attack the country with chemical or biological weapons.

Civil defence officials had instructed the public to get their gas masks out of storage in case Iraq responds to threatened U.S. air strikes by firing Scud missiles armed with non-conventional warheads at Israel.

Acknowledging a shortage of masks, notably for the some 300,000 foreign labourers in the country, the army began telephoning families to request they return masks their children had outgrown or which belonged to persons who have died or moved abroad.

The army also announced that it had ordered an additional 200,000 masks from foreign suppliers while the sole Israeli factory producing the equipment was operating 24 hours-a-day.

Producers of plastic sheeting and duct tape used to create sealed "safe rooms" in homes against chemical or biological attack also said they

were working around the clock.

During the 1991 Gulf war, Iraq fired 39 Scud missiles with conventional warheads at Israel, killing two persons in the Tel Aviv region.

While government officials have repeatedly stated that the likelihood of a new Iraqi attack is minimal, the growing sense of panic among the population was palpable.

"There is a fear of the unknown connected to chemical or biological war which is reviving the trauma of the World War II for many Israelis," said Susan Hattis Rolef, an historian and political scientist.

"This explains in large part the panic which has gripped many Israelis," she said.

The tensions were obvious Sunday in Rishon-Le-Zion near Tel Aviv when a riot erupted after the army tried to close a gas masks distribution centre at 11:00 p.m. despite long lines outside.

The army declared the centre a "closed military zone" in order to have the legal authority to clear out the angry crowd.

If officials for their part were not panicking, the govern-

ment and military were actively preparing for a possible conflict.

In addition to ordering millions of dollars worth of gas masks, antibiotics and antidotes for germ and chemical agents believed to be in Iraq's arsenal, the government has reportedly asked the United States for dozens more Patriot anti-missile missiles.

Israeli press reports said giant U.S. air force transports were due to deliver the defensive weapons early next week. A first battery of Patriots was deployed in southern Israel last week.

Defence Minister Yitzhak Mordechai did little to reassure the population in a speech Tuesday to a group of visiting U.S. rabbis, saying Israel was certain Iraq still had several Scud missile launchers and stocks of chemical and biological weapons.

"This is very difficult situation for Israel," he said.

"We are not part of the conflict in the Gulf area, but we know that Saddam Hussein is a man who no one can really understand what he can do or could do when he is under heavy attack by the United States."

Canada signs agreement to contribute \$1 million to UNRWA

AMMAN (J.T.) — Canada's ambassador to Jordan, Michael J. Molloy, Tuesday announced the signing of the agreement of Canada's contribution of \$1 million to the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) for its shelter rehabilitation programme, according to a Canadian embassy press release.

The signing ceremony took place at UNRWA's headquarters in Gaza.

"This agreement reflects Canada's commitment as the Chair of the Refugee Working Group to improve the living conditions of Palestinian refugees," said Mr. Molloy. "I'm proud that part of this contribution will help improve housing in the poorest areas of refugee camps in Jordan and provide construction work for local labour."

This contribution comes as a response to an appeal by UNRWA to the international community and follows last November's visit by the Canadian Foreign Minister Lloyd Axworthy to the Middle East. Funding is provided by the Canadian International Development Agency for its programme in Gaza, the West Bank and Jordan, the announcement concluded.

Ex-rival promises support to Clerides in Cyprus presidential runoff

NICOSIA (AFP) — Incumbent Cypriot President Glafcos Clerides, facing a run off presidential vote Sunday, received support Tuesday from one of his rivals eliminated in the first round.

Alexis Galanos, who received four per cent of the vote in last Sunday's first round, announced at a press conference that he would support Mr. Clerides in the second round on Feb. 15.

"I decided to support Clerides after the commitment I secured from him that he would form a government of national unity

or, failing that, a government which would enjoy a broad acceptance," he said.

Mr. Galanos said his decision was not binding for any of the people who supported him.

Mr. Galanos was one of seven presidential hopefuls in the first round vote, which ended in a near tie between Mr. Clerides and independent candidate George Iacovou.

Mr. Iacovou squeaked ahead in the first round by taking 40.6 per cent of the vote compared to Mr. Clerides' 40.1 per cent. A candidate needs 50 per cent of the vote to be elected president.

By giving his support to Mr. Clerides, Mr. Galanos rebelled against his party, the centre-right DIKO, which endorses Mr. Iacovou's bid for the presidency.

Both Mr. Clerides, who heads the conservative DISY Party, and Mr. Iacovou, a former foreign minister, are spending the days before the run off angling for support from candidates they eliminated in the first round.

The head of the socialist party EDEK, Vassos Lyssarides, who won 10.6 per cent of the vote, handed a series of demands on

Monday to Mr. Clerides and Mr. Iacovou and is awaiting their response before deciding to whom to back.

In addition to Mr. Galanos and Lyssarides, the first round eliminated the United Democrats' chief George Vassiliou, who took three per cent of the vote; as well as New Horizons' Nicos Koutsou and the Liberal Party's Nicosi Rolandis, who each got less than one per cent.

According to political analysts, Rolandis and Koutsou are expected to hand their support to Mr. Clerides.

Main Algeria labour union said to threaten strike

ALGIERS (R) — Algeria's main labour union said on Tuesday the social situation in the strife-plagued country had reached a "frightening" stage, with mass-layoffs and more and more state factories being shut.

The Union Generale des Travailleurs Algeriens (UGTA), which says it has one million members from Algeria's five million-strong workforce, vowed in a statement to resist any more closures of state-owned industries.

It said this would come through what it called the

mobilisation of its "full abilities of struggle."

The statement did not spell out whether that meant strikes, but the main Algerian newspapers said the wording translated into a threat of a general strike within the next few weeks.

The union listed among other examples of what it called a "frightening trend" the delayed payment of salaries, swelling unemployment, massive layoffs and "brutal, anarchical, blind and barbaric unlimited shutting down of state-owned enterprises."

"The UGTA branches, in perfect agreement with the fair and courageous positions undertaken by the union top leadership, came to a decision on a significant and appropriate mobilisation of all abilities of struggle and resistance," it said in the statement.

It did not say how many firms had been curtailed or give any figures on fired workers. The government had said earlier that thousands of employees would lose jobs in 1997 and 1998 as a by-product of restructuring a bloated workforce and loss-

making state companies. Algeria's official unemployment rate is 28 per cent.

State-owned companies and business produce about two-thirds of Algeria's economic output and employ more than 70 per cent of the total workforce.

The UGTA led a general strike, which spared the vital oil and gas facilities, in 1991 with the clear backing of the government keen to strengthen the union appeal among workers against a then nascent radical union backed by Islamists.

Palestinian pleads innocent in killing of American teen

JERICHO (AP) — A Palestinian accused of taking part in the drive-by shooting of an American teenager in 1996 pleaded innocent on Tuesday. Amjad Hinawi, 26, was driving his friend Khalil Sharif in May 1996 near the Jewish settlement of Beit Al outside the West Bank town of Ramallah, when Sharif pulled out an automatic rifle and opened fire on an Israeli bus, killing 17-year-old David Boim.

Boim, a seminary student, had moved with his family to Jerusalem from New York

City as a child.

Hinawi, a resident of Nablus, turned himself into Palestinian security forces and has spent the past 21 months in an interrogation compound in Jericho.

The trial was delayed while the authority searched for Mr. Sharif, who killed himself in a suicide bombing in Jerusalem last year.

Mr. Hinawi is charged with terrorism and participation in a murder, military prosecutor Colonel Mohammad Bushitawi said. If convicted, he faces a maximum sen-

tence of life in prison with hard labour.

The prosecution requested a two-day delay to assign an attorney to Hinawi, who has refused to hire his own attorney.

Two representatives of the U.S. consulate in Jerusalem attended the trial but refused to speak to reporters.

Israeli spokesman David Bar-Ilan said the trial was a positive development, "provided it won't be a mucky mouse trial, where they sentence him to 25 years and release him after 25 days."

Iran ready for contract to complete first unit of nuclear plant

TEHRAN (AFP) — The Iranian government gave a green light Tuesday to concluding a "contract for completing the first unit" of its planned nuclear plant in Bushehr, on the Persian Gulf, Iran's official IRNA news agency said.

The decision was taken during

a meeting of the government's economic council headed by Iranian President Mohammad Khatami, IRNA reported, without providing more details.

The contract could pertain to acquiring a second reactor for the plant in Bushehr, according to observers here.

In October, the head of the Iranian atomic energy commission, Gholamreza Aghazadeh, affirmed Iran's intention to construct a 1,000-megawatt reactor at the site with assistance from Russian companies.

The reactor is in addition to a water-pressurised 1,000-

megawatt reactor at Bushehr already being constructed with help from Moscow.

Construction of the two Russian reactors has long been planned, but the cost of the operation has led Iran so far to start work on just one. Iran said in July that the first unit of its

Bushehr nuclear plant would enter into service "soon."

Mr. Aghazadeh also said Tuesday that Tehran "wants to sign two separate contracts," one with Russia for starting work on two 440-megawatt units, the other with China for two 300-megawatt units.

JORDAN TELEVISION

Tel. 773111-19

PROGRAMME TWO
16:10 Mr. Bogus
16:30 French Cartoon Films
17:00 Ashuaia
18:00 Children's Programme
— The Finder
18:30 Drama — Neighbours
19:00 Le Journal
19:15 Doc. — E-M6
19:30 News headlines
19:35 Campus Cops
20:00 Traces of Guilt
20:50 Drama — Kung Fu
21:30 News in English
22:00 Soccer match — Burkina Faso vs. Algeria
23:40 Country Music

PRAYER TIMES

05:00 Fajr
06:18 (Sunrise) Duha
11:50 Dhuhr
14:54 Asr
17:21 Maghreb
18:40 Isha

CHURCHES

St. Mary of Nazareth Church Sweifeh, Tel. 810740
Assemblies of God Church Tel. 632785
St. Joseph Church Tel. 624590
Church of the Annunciation Tel. 637440.

JORDAN TIMES DAILY GUIDE AND CALENDAR

Tel. 773111-19

De la Salle Church Tel. 661757
Terra Sancta Church Tel. 622366
Anglican Church Tel. 652826
Armenian Catholic Church Tel. 771331
Armenian Orthodox Church Tel. 775261
St. Ephraim Church Tel. 771751
Amman International Church Tel. 5516245
Evangelical Lutheran Church Tel. 824328
German-speaking Evangelical Congregation Tel. 688404
The Latter-Day Saints Tel. 654932
Church of Nazareth Tel. 675691
The Evangelical Local Church in Amman Tel. 811295
English-speaking Latin Catholics Parish Tel. 614190.

WEATHER

Bulletin supplied by the Department of Meteorology
Cold weather conditions will prevail with skies cloudy to partly cloudy, and a chance of occasional scattered showers. Snow is expected to fall over mountainous areas, and winds northwesterly moderate to active. In Aqaba, skies will be

EMERGENCIES

Food Control Centre. 637111
Civil Defence Department 5661111
Civil Defence Immediate Rescue 630341
Civil Defence Emergency 199
Rescue Police 192, 621111, 637777
Fire Brigade 617101
Blood Bank 775121
Highway Police 843402
Traffic Police 896390
Public Security Department 630321
Hotel Complaints 5605800
Price Complaints 5661176
Water and Sewerage Complaints 897467
Amman Municipality Complaints 787111
Telephone Information (directory assistance) 121
Overseas Calls 010230
Central Amman Telephone Repairs 623101
Abdali Telephone Repairs 5661101
Jordan Television 773111
IRBID: 774111
Water Authority 5680100
Jordan Electricity Authority 815615
Electric Power Company 636381
RJ Flight Information 44-

HOSPITALS

53200 Queen Alia Intl. Airport 44-53200
AMMAN:
Russeini Medical Centre 813813/32
Khalidi Maternity, 644281/6
Akileh Maternity, 642441/2
Jabal Amman Maternity 642362
Malhas, J. Amman 636140
Palestine, Shmeisani 5607071
Shmeisani Hospital 5669131
University Hospital 845845
Al-Mushar Hospital 56672279
The Islamic, Abdali 5666126/37
Al-Ahli, Abdali 5664164/6
Italian, Al-Muhajreen 777101/3
Al-Bashir 775111/26
Army, Marka 891611/15
Queen Alia Hospital 5602240/50
Amal Hospital 5674155
The Arab Centre for Heart and Special Surgery 865199
ZARQA:
Zarqa Govt. Hospital (09)983323
Zarqa National Hospital (09)900560
Ibn Sina Hospital (09)986732
Al Hikma Modern Hospital (09)990990
IRBID:
Princess Basma Hospital (02)275555

FOR THE TRAVELLER

QUEEN ALIA INTERNATIONAL AIRPORT
This information is supplied by Royal Jordanian (RJ) information department at the Queen Alia International Airport Tel. (44)53200 where it should always be verified.
Information on other flights are supplied on phone 44 (52700) or 44(53250).
ARRIVALS
Royal Jordanian (RJ) Flights
07:25 Damascus (RJ)
08:05 Lamaca (RJ)
08:35 Jeddah (RJ)
08:50 Dubai, Abu Dhabi (RJ)
15:00 New York, Amsterdam (RJ)
16:50 Istanbul (RJ)
17:45 Madrid, Geneva (RJ)
18:10 Rome (RJ)
18:20 London, Berlin (RJ)
18:45 Frankfurt, Vienna (RJ)
23:10 Paris, Brussels (RJ)
23:10 Beirut (RJ)

Other Flights

05:50 Bucharest (RO)
09:30 Cairo (MS)
10:15 Doha, Al Hudaidah (TY)
10:30 Jeddah (SV)
10:50 Kuwait (KU)
13:10 Tunis (TU)
13:25 Doha, Abu Dhabi (GF)
13:45 Khartoum (add) (RJ)
13:50 Tel Aviv (LY)
15:05 Vienna (OS)
15:30 Algiers (AH)
16:05 Karachi, Abu Dhabi (PK)
20:10 Beirut (ME)
21:10 Paris, Damascus (AF)
22:30 Athens (OA)
23:15 London (BA)
23:30 London, Beirut (BA)
23:35 Amsterdam (KL)
Royal Wings (RW)
07:45 Aqaba (RW)
09:05 Amman (QAIA) (RW)
09:50 Amman (Marka Airport) (RW)
17:20 Tel Aviv (RW)
18:30 Amman (QAIA) (RW)
21:20 Aqaba (RW)
22:50 Amman (Marka Airport) (RW)
DEPARTURES
09:45 Rome (RJ)
10:40 Berlin, London (RJ)
11:00 Istanbul (RJ)
19:30 Colombo (RJ)

Other Flights

00:35 Amsterdam (KL)
01:55 Bucharest (RO)
06:35 Lamaca (CY)
08:00 Beirut (ME)
08:25 London (BA)
10:30 Cairo (MS)
11:15 Al Hudaidah, Aden (TY)
12:00 Kuwait (KU)
12:00 Jeddah (SV)
14:10 Tunis (TU)
14:20 Sharjah (AH)
15:15 Bahrain, Muscat (GF)
15:10 Tel Aviv (LY)
15:30 Doha (QR)
15:50 Vienna (OS)
19:30 Abu Dhabi, Karachi (PK)
23:55 Damascus, Paris (AF)
Royal Wings (RW)
06:45 Amman (Marka Airport) (RW)
08:15 Aqaba (RW)
09:30 Amman (QAIA) (RW)
16:45 Amman (Marka Airport) (RW)
17:55 Tel Aviv (RW)
20:30 Amman (QAIA) (RW)
21:50 Aqaba (RW)

Regional ecological problems can only be solved through peace — Queen

By Ahmad Khatib
Special to the Jordan Times

AMMAN — Her Majesty Queen Noor told an international conservation forum on Tuesday that an overall solution to regional ecological problems could only be achieved through comprehensive peace.

While globalisation is encouraging countries to deepen cooperation to solve ecological problems, the Middle East remains fragmented by conflicts that threaten the wellbeing of both people and the environment, she said.

"We are caught in a vicious circle: comprehensive solutions to our regional ecological problems will arise only through comprehensive peace," Queen Noor said at the start of a three-day meeting of the World Conservation Union (IUCN) held in cooperation with IUCN National Committee.

"But the scarcity of resources such as water and arable land is one of the sources of conflict. It is impor-

tant to see the environment not as a luxury to be attended to after peace has been achieved, but a key issue for regional stability," she stressed.

Queen Noor, an IUCN patron, said that all countries were aware of the consequences of the world's environmental problems and must find solutions to these challenges.

"But we have not yet found the means of solution will to enforce policies to solve these problems," she explained.

"Our key challenge is to use the multi-faceted strengths of the IUCN to work together, drawing upon both modern technical expertise and the cumulative wisdom of our past experience to chart a path towards sustainability and wellbeing on every level, local, regional and global."

The forum, a gathering of IUCN members, commissions and patrons, is focusing on programming for the region's main conservation issues. It is a follow-up to the first regional forum held in Riyadh in 1995.

Queen Noor reviewed several Jordanian programmes that were implemented with foreign help to fight pressing environmental problems and said they could be used as examples for other countries.

Together with the United Nations and the World Bank, Jordan pioneered the Azraq Oasis Project to restore an arid-zone wetland ecosystem, Queen Noor said.

"Jordan also took advantage of 'debt-for-nature' swaps based on the idea that in the developing countries the debt crisis and environmental problems are interlinked," Queen Noor added.

The IUCN will help broker deals between the Ministry of Finance and various donors while the IUCN National Committee will select projects to benefit from such aid.

The IUCN National Committee also worked hard to promote conservation initiatives, especially in setting up the regional committee that will include West and Central Asia and North Africa, Queen Noor said.

Because conservation issues were interrelated, countries should "think globally and act locally," she stated.

The IUCN, among the world's most active conservation organisations, has nearly 9,000 technical and policy experts in six global commissions giving information and sharing the conservation experiences of 895 institutions worldwide.

IUCN Director General David McDowell said the forum will address the serious issues of long-term sustainability of the planet.

He said the IUCN was seeking inspiration from various regions and "from the field" as it celebrates its 50th anniversary this year and starts charting a strategy for the next 50 years.

"In the medium-term, at least, the big security threat we all face is environmental. The world's resources are finite," Mr. McDowell said.

"Underlying many of the regional and national conflicts which now assail us all is a fundamental conflict over

access to and the sustainability of resources, not least natural living resources and water," he explained.

Mohammad Abirug, IUCN vice president, said most countries were facing various challenges regarding sustainable development and conserving the environment as a "result of unjustified policies and arbitrary behaviour of the citizens themselves."

"Perhaps our meeting will give us the chance to solve these challenges," he said.

The president of Jordan's Royal Society for the Conservation of Nature, Anis Muzasher, suggested several ideas for an overall regional cooperation strategy and said the area needed general legislation for the environment.

"We must strengthen cooperation in areas of exchanging information and experience related to the introduction of endangered species and protected areas in the region," Mr. Muzasher said.

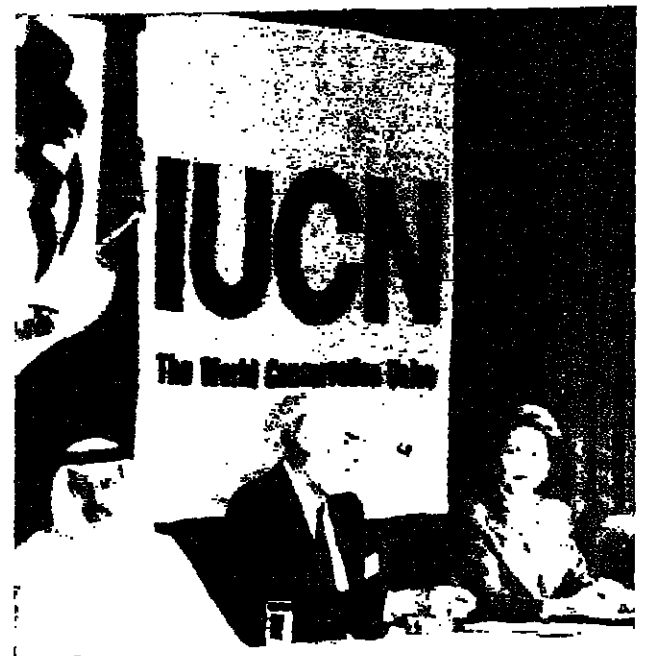
"A comprehensive database will be a valuable aid to the region and its ongoing efforts."

Later Tuesday, Queen Noor attended a dinner organised by the IUCN as part of the IUCN's 50th anniversary celebrations, according to a press release.

Queen Noor honoured former IUCN President Mohammad Kassas for his pioneering work in the field of environmental conservation, particularly in plant ecology and combating desertification.

Dr. Kassas, who is a professor emeritus of botany at the University of Cairo, has received numerous international prizes that include the United Nations Prize for Environment, the Arab League Educational, Cultural and Scientific Organisation (ALESCO) Gold Medal, and the Commander in the Order of the Golden Ark from the Netherlands.

Mr. McDowell also announced the establishment of a new IUCN award that will be named after Queen Noor as a tribute to her long-standing environmental endeavours, the statement said.



Her Majesty Queen Noor, along with Abdul Aziz Abu Zinada, secretary general of the National Committee for Wildlife Conservation and Development in Saudi Arabia, and David McDowell, IUCN director general, participate in the first session of the three-day IUCN meeting (Photo by Yousef Allan)

NEWS IN BRIEF

EU envoy Moratinos arrives Thursday

AMMAN (Petra) — The European Union envoy for the Middle East peace process, Miguel Moratinos, will arrive here Thursday for a one-day visit for talks with senior officials on the latest developments in the region and the Middle East peace process.

Cabinet appoints ministry secretary general

AMMAN (Petra) — The Cabinet on Tuesday decided to appoint Muzahem Shawkat Muheisen as secretary general of the Ministry of Transport and Telecommunications.

Iranian delegation arrives Saturday

AMMAN (Petra) — A nine-member Iranian parliamentary delegation, headed by the chairperson of the Jordanian-Iranian Parliamentary Friendship Committee, will arrive here Saturday on a four-day visit for talks with senior officials and parliamentarians on bilateral relations in various fields.

Japan to provide \$8 million in medical equipment

AMMAN (Petra) — Jordan and Japan Tuesday signed an agreement under which the Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA) will provide the Ministry of Health and Medical Care with equipment worth \$8 million to upgrade the medical services at the ministry's hospitals. The agreement was signed for the ministry by Secretary General Adnan Abbas, and for JICA by Hiroshi Ohara, head of a delegation currently on a visit to Jordan.

Tunisian minister arrives for talks on environment-related issues

AMMAN (Petra) — Jordan and Tunisia Tuesday opened talks on cooperation in environment-related fields with the goal of concluding an agreement for coordinating the two countries' efforts to protect the environment.

The Jordanian delegation is being headed by Minister of Municipal and Rural Affairs and the Environment Tawfiq Kreishan and the Tunisian side is being led by his counterpart, Mohammad Malkik, who arrived here Monday evening on a three-day visit to the Kingdom.

Welcoming the Tunisian minister of the environment, Mr. Kreishan said the talks are to be crowned by the signing of an accord dealing with pollution, desertification,

water resource protection, waste disposal, stemming industrial pollution, and other relevant issues.

According to the Ministry of Municipal and Rural Affairs and the Environment, the agreement will provide for raising public awareness through the media and the exchange of publications and posters, introducing protection of the environment as a subject into the school curricula in both countries, and joint research.

The ministry said the two sides will study each other's regulations and laws concerning the environment, exchange expertise in environment-related legislation, conduct joint studies on the effects of chemicals and pesti-

cides on agricultural production, examine recycling programmes, pool efforts to protect surface and underground water resources from pollution, conduct joint research on dealing with marine pollution in harbours, and exchange information and expertise on how to dispose of dangerous and poisonous waste and protect the atmosphere.

Under the terms of the agreement to be signed during the delegation's visit, Jordan and Tunisia will also agree on training personnel involved in fighting pollution and greening semi-desert areas.

After the preliminary meetings, the two ministers visited a number of waste-water treatment plants.

Airline negotiating with Egyptian authorities to operate tourist flights

AMMAN (Petra) — Royal Wings, a subsidiary of Royal Jordanian (RJ), the national air carrier, is currently negotiating with the Egyptian civil aviation authorities to operate regular and chartered flights between tourist sites in the two countries, according to Royal Wings Director General Ahd Quntar.

Royal Wings is seeking to operate flights between Aqaba and Cairo and between Aqaba and Sharm

El Sheikh, Al Ghardaha and Luxor, said Mr. Quntar in a statement marking Royal Wings' second anniversary.

In 1996, Royal Wings transported 39,042 passengers between Amman and Aqaba and 13,159 on the Amman-Tel Aviv route. In 1997, the airline transported 43,471 passengers from Amman to Aqaba, registering a 12 per cent increase, and 21,419 between Amman and Tel Aviv, an increase of

63 per cent over the 1996 figures, according to Mr. Quntar.

After the conclusion of the 1994 Jordan-Israel peace treaty, the number of tourists coming to Jordan increased dramatically, prompting RJ to create Royal Wings to conduct medium-range flights within the Middle East, he noted.

Referring to the flights to Tel Aviv, Mr. Quntar said Royal Wings began operat-

ing five flights a week to Tel Aviv in 1996. The number of weekly flights later increased to six and as of Feb. 22, the number will be seven.

Royal Wings last month received a second 50-seat plane and has made plans for operating routes to Cyprus, Rhodes, and Antalya in Turkey, and will be conducting three instead of two daily flights between Amman and Aqaba.

Jordanian, Palestinian health ministers agree on committee to implement protocol

AMMAN (J.T.) — The Jordanian and Palestinian health ministers Tuesday agreed to set up a joint committee co-chaired by the under-secretaries of the two ministries to work out an appropriate mechanism for the implementation of a 1996 health protocol.

The agreement was reached on the second day of a three-day visit to Jordan by Palestinian Health Minister Riyadh Zanoun, who with his

counterpart Ashraf Kundi discussed health and medical assistance that can be offered to the Palestinians through the protocol.

Dr. Kundi reviewed his ministry's capacity for providing technical and academic training to Palestinian medical personnel, nurses and paramedics, according to a statement by the Jordan News Agency, Petra.

For his part, Dr. Zanoun submitted the needs of the

Palestinian in these fields, pointing out that there was an urgent need for holding training courses in Jordan for Palestinian personnel and despatching Jordanian specialists to the Palestinian self-rule areas to work for specific periods of time. He also discussed the need for technicians to maintain medical equipment in Palestinian hospitals.

Other topics discussed, according to Petra, included

cooperation in pharmaceuticals, health insurance, health economics, and health centre management, in addition to the treatment of Palestinian patients in Jordanian hospitals upon referral by the Palestinian health authorities.

The treatment of Palestinians here is covered by the 1996 protocol, which also provides for medium- and long-term training courses for medical staff, among other matters.

Organic produce project promoting less harmful agricultural methods

By Nadia Mukhlis
Special to the Jordan Times

AMMAN — Organically-grown fruits and vegetables have been in high demand after hitting the shelves of supermarkets and groceries under a private pilot project launched with German aid four years ago.

Thirty farmers are involved in the project, which promotes the use of safe and environmentally friendly methods, project supervisor Samir Abdul Jabbar told the Jordan Times.

The farm produce, the prices of which are around 20 per cent higher than non-organic vegetables and fruits, are grown under independent supervision after "having passed international pesticide residue tests," he added.

Many Jordanians have been concerned for years by possible abuse of pesticides by local farmers, many of them illiterate or trying to reduce expenses. Saudi Arabia recently lifted a five-year ban on imports of Jordanian farm produce on grounds that many farmers were using waste-water as a

means of irrigation in addition to the uncontrollable use of pesticides — charges repeatedly denied by the government.

The two-phase project, to end by December 2001, is supervised by the National Centre of Agricultural Research for Technological Training and financed by the German Agency for Technical Cooperation (GTZ). Mr. Abdul Jabbar explained, GTZ is spending a total of DM7 million (JD2.3 million) on the scheme, Jordan's first official effort to introduce organically-grown produce.

"The project plans to... reduce the usage of chemicals as pesticides and to exchange them with products that are more friendly and safer to both the environment and human health," he said.

"The project is open to all farmers that want to use the new technology," he said. "We provide free technical advice to all."

The project managed to lure 30 farmers under the first three-year phase, launched in 1995. Now it is seeking to widen its

base and include as many farmers as possible by the year 2001.

Farmers under the project are adapting certain measures and tests to ensure that their products are safe for human consumption.

"A farmer needs to sign a declaration form whereby he has to go by the rules and the systems set," Mr. Abdul Jabbar said. "He will undergo checks from engineers, who will test and give advice."

The engineers make regular visits to these farms and send random samples from vegetables and fruits to laboratories to ensure "they are free from any harmful chemical residues," Mr. Abdul Jabbar explained.

"The farmer is then provided with a certificate that entitles him to sell his products as chemical-free goods, in boxes with a distinct sticker that customers look for when buying these products."

The project will soon market produce across the country through various central vegetable and fruit markets.

NCP declines to elaborate on reasons behind Rawabdeh's resignation

AMMAN (J.T.) — The National Constitutional Party (NCP) Tuesday confirmed the resignation of its second man, Deputy Secretary General Abdul Ra'uf Rawabdeh, but declined to disclose the reasons behind it.

"Mr. Rawabdeh submitted his resignation to NCP Secretary General Abdul Hadi Majali, and the executive committee will discuss it in its next regular meeting on Saturday," NCP Spokesperson Hakim Khair told the Jordan Times on Tuesday.

He said the party will give more details on the resignation after Saturday's meeting.

Mr. Rawabdeh, a former deputy prime minister, also declined to elaborate on the reasons behind his decision, which took many politicians by surprise.

"I do not want to be politically involved in any party any more," Mr. Rawabdeh told the Jordan Times.

The much-touted NCP has been plagued by rivalries and personal feuds since its creation in May,

leading to the resignations of over 200 members. Many quit the party weeks before to Nov. 4 parliamentary elections.

Mr. Rawabdeh was one of only two NCP candidates — out of a total of 11 — who won in the elections.

NCP chief Abdul Hadi Majali, brother of Prime Minister Abdul Salam Majali, also won a seat in the 80-member Lower House.

Analysts had earlier suggested that the coalition, formed from the merger of

nine centrist parties as well as independent tribal leaders and senior officials, would become a dominant power in Jordan's political scene.

But a storm of prominent resignations, including former NCP President Akif Fayed, soon led to rumours in political circles that a second pro-government party could be established.

The resignees have accused the party's leadership of "tyranny" and undemocratic procedures in decision-making.

what's going on

- FILMS**
- *Children's film "Post Man Pat" at the British Council, Jabal Amman at 5:00 p.m.
 - *Spanish film "The Swordsmanship Teacher" at Instituto Cervantes, Jabal Amman on Thursday Feb. 12 at 5:00 p.m.
 - *"Goya" at Darat Al Funun, Jabal Waddeh on Thursday Feb. 12 at 5:30 p.m.
 - *German film "Justiz" at Goethe-Institut, Jabal Amman at 7:00 p.m.
 - *"The Preacher's Wife" at the American Centre, Abdoun on Thursday Feb. 12 at 5:00 p.m.
- CONCERT**
- *Flute and viola duet by Issan Adnan and Assad Mohammad Ali (Sommer Group) playing pieces by Mozart at Darat Al Funun, Jabal Waddeh (Tel. 643251) at 6:00 p.m. (To be followed by a discussion on similarities between painting and music).
- PLAY**
- *Children's play "A Theatre Dream" at the Royal Cultural Centre at 10:00 a.m. (daily until Feb. 21).
- WORLDNET DIALOGUE**
- *A one-hour Worldnet dialogue via satellite (in English) on Black American Literature at 3:00 p.m. at the American Centre auditorium.
 - Panels: Dr. Rula Kanaana and Ms. Laila Al Khair, will address questions and comments to two panelists in Washington, Ms. Donna Wyatt Howell, author of "I was a Slave," which is a collection of 24 books portraying photographs of former slaves, and Ms. Valerie Babish, Associate Professor of English at Georgetown University.

Local charitable society helping young couples tie the knot

By Ahmad Khatib
Special to the Jordan Times

AMMAN — Khaleedah and Atia Abbas are among 791 Jordanians who managed to get married after receiving interest-free loans from a local Islamic charity seeking to help young couples tie the knot.

Al Afaf (charity) Charity Society was set up in 1993 to help facilitate marriages — the number one concern for thousands of young Jordanians after finding a job.

"Without the society, it was difficult to get married, especially with all the complicated requirements that faced us," Mr. Abbas, 40, told the Jordan Times.

"At the beginning, our families did not accept the idea, but when they understood the goal of Al Afaf, they became more than satisfied," he added.

Soaring bride prices and wedding costs are driving many men and women to delay marriages, a trend officials blame for rising divorce rates and a growing number of Jordanian spinsters.

Al Afaf, keen to protect society from social "ills," including spinsterhood and pre-marital sex, is trying to help Jordanians start families, regardless of their religion or race.

"Spinsterhood and [social] frustration are spreading because of unreasonable wedding costs and the complications that accompany matrimony," Al Afaf Director Mufid Sarhan told the Jordan Times in a recent interview.

In a country with a per capita income of JD1,420, an average wedding could cost between JD6,000-7,000, including the bride price, gold gifts and a simple wedding party.

The independent charity has dis-

bursed around JD400,000 in easy-term loans to Jordanians wishing to get married after studying their social and financial situation, he said.

"We cooperate with the Islamic Bank, which is giving us interest-free loans because it believes in the cases of these young people," Mr. Sarhan said.

Al Afaf set up committees in various parts of the Kingdom, including the densely-populated cities of Zarqa and Irbid and in the impoverished Jordan Valley.

The charity hosts lectures to remind people of the importance of family links and helps young couples find "their better half" by soliciting applications from interested men and women.

Likely matches are able to arrange meetings inside the premises of the society in the presence of family members to discuss future plans. But

the charity is keen to stress that it is not a dating agency.

"We study their applications confidentially, in order to help them get together," Mr. Sarhan said. "After that, the process goes traditionally in line with our social habits."

Marriage in Islam, Jordan's official religion, is a two-part process. The first is the agreement between the couple, which is witnessed by a cleric, and the second is an announcement that the marriage has taken place through a wedding.

Al Afaf has organised four group weddings of over 17 couples to cut down on costs and educate people that expensive parties are not useful.

"You could never imagine the signs of happiness on their faces and through their behaviour," Mr. Sarhan said of the mass marriages, the last of which was held in Irbid last August.

A 1995 study on unemployment

and poverty found that young people were getting married later on in life because of greater openness, improved living standards and more women joining the labour force.

But dating before marriage in general remains restricted in a conservative society where most unions are arranged by families chiefly concerned with money and status.

The average marrying age for men rose to 28.6 in 1995 from 26.8 in 1991, while women tended to marry at the age of 24.8, up from 22.8 over the same period.

A group of Jordanians are planning to set up a similar society to boost social solidarity and encourage marriages after a study found out that the country had 270,000 spinsters and bachelors. The Jordanian Social Solidarity hopes to be legalised soon.

Lewinsky fights subpoena to testify in sex-and-lies scandal

WASHINGTON (AFP) — Monica Lewinsky and her lawyers are fighting to quash a subpoena to have the former White House intern testify without a grant of immunity before a grand jury probing sex-and-lies allegations against U.S. President Bill Clinton.

Ms. Lewinsky's attorney William Ginsburg told reporters in Los Angeles Monday that he planned to go to court to prevent his client from testifying Thursday before a grand jury and to enforce an immunity agreement for Ms. Lewinsky he says was struck Feb. 2 with independent counsel Kenneth Starr.

Cable News Network said Mr. Ginsburg was planning to initiate legal proceedings Tuesday.

Mr. Ginsburg, who along with Ms. Lewinsky was in Los Angeles Monday, has in the past hinted that Ms. Lewinsky would invoke the U.S. constitution's Fifth Amendment right against self-incrimination and keep silent at a hearing if she was not granted immunity from prosecution.

Mr. Starr is leading an investigation into allegations Mr. Clinton had an

affair with Ms. Lewinsky and sought to cover it up.

Mr. Clinton denies the affair but has refused to comment on the nature of his relationship with Ms. Lewinsky, who began working as an intern at the White House in 1995 when she was 21.

Ms. Lewinsky, who also denied the affair in a sworn statement, was secretly tape-recorded talking about it to a co-worker on tapes which Mr. Starr has obtained.

Mr. Clinton's lawyer David Kendall filed a formal complaint against Mr. Starr in a federal court Monday, charging him with wrongfully revealing details of the case.

"These leaks, if they're coming from the independent counsel's office, are unlawful and they are grossly unfair," said White House spokesman Joe Lockhart.

The grand jury testimonies in the case which began Jan. 21 are under seal and U.S. law bars the prosecutor from discussing them.

But the media have been given extraordinary access to sensational details of the case which Mr. Clinton's

aides charge come from Mr. Starr to bolster his case.

Mr. Kendall was expected to call for an investigation and possible sanctions against Mr. Starr, a Republican who is also investigating the Whitewater and other White House affairs.

Hitting back in the scandal threatening Mr. Clinton, White House aides went on a very vocal offensive against Mr. Starr last week.

But Mr. Lockhart said Monday the matter was now in the hands of Mr. Clinton's legal team and that the White House would stay silent on the proceedings.

Mr. Ginsburg has also charged that leaking information was an attempt to put pressure on Ms. Lewinsky by Mr. Starr, who reportedly wants her to testify that Mr. Clinton urged her to lie about their relationship, which is an impeachable offence.

Republican leaders have already discussed how to handle any preliminary impeachment proceedings, according to an aide to House Speaker Newt Gingrich.

Money from a reserve

account could be used to hire the staff that would be necessary to review material if Mr. Starr dumps "a couple of hundred thousand pieces of paper" on the Judiciary Committee, the aide said.

Mr. Starr is considering submitting the evidence his office has gathered on the Ms. Lewinsky matter to the Judiciary Committee instead of a grand jury.

Meanwhile, the media leaks — and retractions — continued unabated.

Newsweek magazine reported that lawyers close to the president's defence said a new witness — White House aide Ashley Raines — told investigators she listened to telephone messages from Mr. Clinton left on Ms. Lewinsky's answering machine. Ms. Raines also gave investigators detailed accounts of what Ms. Lewinsky told her about the alleged affair with the president, the magazine said.

The Wall Street Journal Monday retracted a report that White House employee Bayani Nelvis had testified he spotted Mr. Clinton and Ms. Lewinsky alone together in a White House office.



White House aide Ashley Raines leaves the U.S. District Court in Washington, after testifying before the grand jury investigating the allegations of the possible affair between President Clinton and White House intern Monica Lewinsky (Reuters photo)

China deports exiled dissident who sought to build opposition

BEIJING (AFP) — China moved quickly to deport U.S.-based dissident Wang Bingzhang who had slipped back into the country to form an opposition party, but released three of four dissidents held on suspicion of joining his effort.

Mr. Wang's brother, and officials at the U.S. embassy, confirmed he had arrived in Los Angeles on a flight from Shanghai Monday.

The brother, Wang Bingwu, who lives in Canada, said by telephone that Wang Bingzhang had called their parents from Los Angeles to say he had arrived safely around mid-day.

"I don't know if they forced him back or he wanted to go back," Wang Bingwu said. "He mentioned that he was in custody for three days, and was treated reasonably there."

"He only told my parents quickly that he's well, and told us not to worry."

New York-based Chinese dissident Fu Shenqi said Wang Bingzhang was staying in Los Angeles "at a friend of a friend's house," adding he understood "police forced him to get on the plane."

The deportation brought to an end a two-week saga, after Mr. Wang, 50, slipped into the country from Macau on Jan. 23, prompting a large-scale manhunt as he was on a list of activists to be refused entry into China.

He managed to evade the authorities for two weeks, before being caught and detained on Feb. 6, north of Bengbu.

Tuesday Chinese authorities accused Mr. Wang of slipping back into the country under a false identity.

"Wang Bingzhang used a false name to get a visa by cheating. He entered Chinese territory illegally," said foreign ministry spokesman Zhu Bangzao at a regular press briefing.

"In light of our laws on the administration of entry and exit, the Chinese authorities of public security questioned him in accordance with the law and after that deported him." He refused to elaborate.

A spokesman for the U.S. consulate in Shanghai said the embassy had confirmed with the foreign ministry that Mr. Wang had been deported.

"There are no issues left to be resolved between China and the U.S. on the case. The story is basically over now," he said.

"The real issue is how quietly and quickly the

Chinese did this."

According to agreements between the U.S. and China, if Chinese authorities detain a U.S. citizen, they must notify the U.S. embassy within four days. After that, a representative from the embassy must be allowed to visit the detainee within 48 hours, the spokesman said.

In this case, the Chinese deported Mr. Wang within three days, according to his younger brother.

China also moved quickly to release three out of four dissidents detained on suspicion of trying to join forces with Mr. Wang.

However, the fourth dissident, 43-year-old mathematician teacher Wang Tingjin, is still in police custody, his wife told AFP late Tuesday.

"Police said he hadn't yet confessed clearly," his wife, Zhang Fangrong, said. She said she was not told when he would be released.

Chinese dissident Zhang Rujun told AFP he was freed Tuesday morning, after being taken into custody by police Sunday.

Police questioned him about his connection to Wang Bingzhang, after he met with Mr. Wang in Shanghai, he said. "The police asked me if I knew who he was, and I told them he was just a personal friend," Mr. Zhang said.

Two other dissidents taken into custody on suspicion of meeting with Mr. Wang have been released in the past two days.

Chinese dissident Wang Donghai was released by police Tuesday, after being detained overnight, when officials in Shanghai found he had not been in touch with the exiled dissident, he told AFP.

A fourth activist, Shanghai-based Yang Qingheng, 44, was released late Monday, after he told them he didn't know Mr. Wang, following two hours of questioning, he told AFP.

Meanwhile, the U.S. consular spokesman in Shanghai said U.S. authorities were looking into accusations that Mr. Wang entered China on a fake U.S. passport. Wang Bingwu said Monday that although his brother had lived in the United States for 16 years he did not hold U.S. citizenship.

Diplomats in China said the Chinese probably used phone-tapping to track Mr. Wang's movements. "Apparently, there were lots of phone calls going back and forth, and everyone knows about the phone tapping here," said one Western diplomat.

China says U.S. physicist accused of spying is innocent

BEIJING (AFP) — China said Tuesday accusations that a Taiwan-born U.S. physicist had handed it classified nuclear secrets were false and part of an attempt to undermine relations with the United States.

Scientist Peter Lee's conversations with Chinese scientists were "completely normal international academic exchanges," said Zhu Bangzao, foreign ministry spokesman.

"To construe such normal academic exchange as something else is totally unjustified and is prompted by ulterior motives," he said.

Dr. Lee, 58, who lives south of Los Angeles, admitted in December that he had met Chinese authorities about his work as a research physicist at Los Alamos National Laboratory in New Mexico in 1985.

He said he knew the information about laser energy simulating nuclear detonation was classified and that he passed information to help the Chinese.

If found guilty of passing classified military information, Dr. Lee could face a maximum sentence of 15 years in federal prison and a \$250,000 fine. A plea agreement has been filed.

The Chinese foreign ministry protest was echoed by seven Chinese scientists Tuesday, in an open letter published by the official Xinhua news agency. They said the accusations were a plot to undermine improving Sino-U.S. relations and that Peter Lee had been forced to confess.

"At present Sino-U.S. relations are improving. So we do not want to see the attempt of a small number of people to take advantage of this, to create trouble and undermine normal exchange between scientists of our two countries,"

thus disturbing the improvement and growth of Sino-U.S. relations," said foreign ministry spokesman Zhu.

Mr. Zhu said Peter Lee had been invited to give lectures in various Chinese universities and scientific institutes and take part in international academic conferences in China since the 1980s. But the contents of his lectures were purely based on "basic research," he insisted.

The seven Chinese scientists urged U.S. scientists to "uphold justice and help Doctor Peter Lee to be free from persecution in the United States."

"He has been forced to confess to his so-called guilt and ... we do not like to see some people still trying to jeopardise the friendly relationship between our two nations in academic circles," they wrote.

The Chinese scientists said they were "greatly shocked" by the accusations. They said that during his visits in 1985 and 1997, Dr. Lee delivered lectures relating to basic research but did not deal with data that might have important military applications for China.

"In January 1985, Dr. Lee's lectures did not go beyond the contents that had already been published in academic journals and were far from relevant for simulating nuclear detonations," the scientists said.

"In May 1997, Dr. Lee talked about microwave backscattering from the sea surface and nothing in his lectures went beyond findings published in academic papers," they added.

The seven scientists did not discuss the possibility that Dr. Lee had handed the information over to Chinese agents.

Armenia denies threat of new hostilities with Azerbaijan

MOSCOW (AFP) — The Armenian foreign ministry Tuesday denied there was a danger of resumed hostilities between Armenia and Azerbaijan over the breakaway Nagorno-Karabakh enclave, Interfax news agency said.

The statement said such predictions were a "deliberately distorted interpretation of the latest events in the republic, seriously impeding the logical development of the process of the Karabakh conflict settlement."

The foreign ministry also reaffirmed its readiness to observe a truce signed in May 1994 and Armenia's determination to "undertake all steps necessary for it to grow into a durable and

lasting peace." President Ter-Petrosian resigned last week after his parliamentary support collapsed over his peace policy for Nagorno-Karabakh, a secessionist ethnic Armenian majority enclave inside Azerbaijan controlled by Armenian forces.

The resignation and a proliferation of hard-line sentiments in Armenia prompted concerns that military conflict with Azerbaijan over the enclave might resume.

Prime Minister Robert Kocharian, a fervent nationalist who spearheaded Nagorno-Karabakh's independence drive from Baku, is acting as head of state until fresh presidential elections set for March 16.

Prescott gets a soaking at Brit awards ceremony

LONDON (AFP) — The annual Brit Awards for music were something of a washout for Britain's Deputy Prime Minister John Prescott.

Shortly before the end of Monday night's British music industry awards ceremony, he was drenched with water in a struggle with Danbert Nobacon, a member of the anarchist band Chumbawamba who leapt on to his table.

Police were called and Mr. Nobacon was arrested, but released after Mr. Prescott did not immediately press charges. The minister was said to be considering Tuesday whether to lodge a formal complaint.

The politician's son

David, a TV producer, said "a man came towards the group with a bin of water. He jumped on to the table and the women, including Mr. John's wife, were terrified by the aggressive act."

"John leapt to their defence and pushed the man off the table, but during this incident John and the rest of the people on the table were drenched with water."

Spice Girl Geri Halliwell was one of the first to comfort Mr. Prescott after the incident.

Mr. Nobacon, 35, said he was protesting against the government for abandoning 300 Liverpool dockers who last month gave up a strike which had lasted since 1995.

Rescuers comb quake-hit Afghan villages amid fears of disease

KHOJA-KHAIRA. Afghanistan (AFP) — Aid workers Tuesday combed a remote snowbound region devastated by a huge earthquake which killed some 4,000 people amid fears for survivors facing after-shocks, hunger and disease.

The race against time to reach the villages, some a two-day donkey ride away, came amid growing fears of epidemics spread by tainted water supplies.

The aid effort was being coordinated by the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) and Medecins Sans Frontieres (Doctors Without Borders), but there were only a dozen foreign aid workers on the ground facing a mammoth task.

"We fear the contamination of water with undiscovered dead bodies and dead animals lying around in the villages," Sandrine Chopin of the European Commission Humanitarian Office said.

Tuesday seven jeeps loaded with aid workers, including U.N. staff from neighbouring Badkashan province and carrying emergency medical equipment, set off to scour the region to assess the full scale of the disaster.

But an air search was delayed due to bad weather conditions and low-lying cloud.

About 4,000 people were reported to have been killed in Wednesday's quake, but hundreds more may still be lying undiscovered, according to aid officials.

A United Nations spokesman in Kabul said the U.N. "is investigating the possibility of a helicopter survey of the area

with the help of U.N. offices in neighbouring Tajikistan.

Some of the wounded were being treated in Rostaq clinic. Most suffered from burns and broken bones, after their mud-and-wood huts caught fire when burning stoves were toppled by the quake.

"There was a big shake and my house fell down. My leg was stuck over the fire as I screamed for help, until some neighbours came and got me out," Abdul Hamid told AFP from his hospital bed.

The subsistence farmer, who was in his 30s, had to have his leg amputated after being trapped for 30 minutes in the hamlet of Sar-i-Ghar. Four members of his family were killed.

Some 90 patients were crowded into the 30-bed clinic Tuesday, sleeping on mattresses thrown on the floors as staff struggled to cope.

One haunted little girl was found wandering in the ruins of her home. She has not spoken since, and no one knows what happened to her family, staff said.

A Belgian Medecins Sans Frontieres team, who were the first Westerners to reach the site, believe as many as 27 villages could have been affected by the quake, which registered 5.6 on the Richter scale.

The epicentre was located about 500 kilometres north of Peshawar on the Afghan-Tajikistan border in a remote and mountainous region.

So far only eight of the nearest villages have been visited by the rescue teams some 2,000 metres above sea-level.

They were told in one

flattened village that 1,800 people were killed in the hamlet alone. Another 300 died in a nearby half-destroyed village, the team said in a message received by the ICRC at its office in Pakistan.

The trip to the nearest villages some 12 to 20 kilometres away is a bone-shaking two-hour drive over rough terrain followed by a 20-minute uphill hike.

Aid officials said they were considering other options of how to reach the stricken outlying villages, which huddle further up the snow-covered mountain slopes.

"Now the goal is to visit all the villages to provide a needs assessment," said Jim Soonarone, medical coordinator for the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC).

"However some of the villages are so far away we cannot be sure if there are more injured out there and what the impact on those villages is," he added Tuesday.

Medical supplies, tents and blankets have been reaching the area by special flights and convoys organised by Pakistan and the Red Cross.

The MSF has used some military helicopters provided by the ousted Afghan government, which controls Takhar province, for ferrying only medical supplies, an MSF official said.

Aftershocks have also led to a flood of panicked villagers. "Frightened survivors are leaving villages and are on roads," said Red Cross spokesman Juan Martinez, saying many were on their way to the Takhar provincial capital of Taloqan.

Potential vaccine for ovarian cancer under way

WASHINGTON (R) — A team of U.S. cancer researchers said Monday they had created what they think could potentially be a vaccine against cancer of the ovaries using a patient's own cancer cells.

The vaccine stimulated the immune systems of volunteers although there was no evidence yet it could work against cancer, they told a meeting of the Society of Gynecologic Oncologists in Orlando, Florida.

Dr. Charles Duntion and colleagues at Jefferson Medical College in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, tested the vaccine on six patients.

"We looked for an immune reaction, with the idea that such a reaction might mean the vaccine would prove potentially beneficial," Dr. Duntion said in a statement.

But he said surgery and chemotherapy would still be the first choice of treatment for ovarian cancer. "I doubt that the vaccine will ever become the primary treatment," Dr. Duntion said.

Some of the patient's cancerous cells are taken out and weakened with a chemical. This allows the body's immune system to recognise and attack them — and hopefully all the other cancer cells.

Jefferson researchers, working with Kansas city based Avax Technologies Inc are also testing a cancer vaccine for malignant melanoma — skin cancer that has spread to the lymph nodes. This vaccine is so promising it is in phase III trials to see how well it actually does work.

Sonia Gandhi takes India polls by storm

NEW DELHI (AFP) — A month after her political debut near the scene of her husband's assassination, Italian-born Sonia Gandhi has taken India by storm.

To most Indians, the mother-of-two widow of Rajiv Gandhi was an enigma when she addressed 15,000 people in the southern town of Sriperumbudur early in January, urging them to vote for her husband's once-dominant Congress party.

Sonia Gandhi, who has spent the past seven years since Rajiv's death concentrating on charity work, was clearly in at ease as she spoke in Italian-accented English, reading from a prepared text while ringed by

armed commandos. That uncertainty has gone. Sonia Gandhi is now an aggressive campaigner, hitting out at Hindu nationalists and other Congress rivals.

Some even compare her style with that of Indira Gandhi, her mother-in-law and India's prime minister for 16 years.

Congress President Sitaram Kesri, virtually sidelined by his party to make way for her, said Tuesday: "Sonia Gandhi's campaign has put a stop to the hopes of the nationalists of coming to power ... there is a perceptible wave in our favour."

Even her sternest critics admit that Sonia Gandhi, even though she has declined to

become a candidate, has begun altering the political landscape — as well as predictions of the outcome of the polls between Feb. 16-March 7.

"Sonia Gandhi has become the focal point of the 1998 elections," said Congress spokeswoman Ambika Soni.

She said India's oldest party, hoping to close the gap on the dominant Hindu nationalist BJP (Indian People's Party), had been "rejuvenated," adding: "She has given us a fight to look forward to."

"When the elections were announced, it seemed as if the BJP was just waiting to take power. The whole thing has reversed."

Even diehard Congress

opponents concede there has been an impact.

Monday BJP President Lal Krishna Advani admitted Sonia Gandhi's entrance meant it was no longer a "one-horse race."

Doraiswamy Raja, a leader of the outgoing centre-left United Front coalition which is the third aspirant for power, said Tuesday: "She has certainly benefited the Congress and made things difficult for BJP. That is a fact."

In just a month Gandhi — who does not hold a post in the Congress — has become the de facto power centre in the party, led by the Nehru-Gandhi family for around 40 years since independence in 1947.

Schism jeopardises push for Aussie republic

CANBERRA (AFP) — Hardline republicans threatened to walk out of constitutional talks here Tuesday, jeopardising the dream of ushering in an Australian republic by 2001 as time ran out to reach agreement.

Friction between republicans, fuelled by disagreement over whether a president should be elected by parliament or by popular ballot, has overshadowed the two-week debate on Australia's future.

With the talks now in their seventh day, all the factions are aware they have precious little time to agree on a possible republic model, which will be put to a vote Friday, and if approved, be taken to a referendum.

Despite earlier promises to work towards a compromise, the hardline Direct Presidential Election Group (DPEG) said it would stage a walkout if the mainstream Australian Republican Movement (ARM) did not give ground.

"It is always possible that you get a walkout where people feel they haven't been heard, and that would be a catastrophe," said direct election advocate Moira Rayner.

The group has accused the ARM of colluding with the government and monarchists to force through a republic model in which a president is elected by committee, or by a two-thirds parliamentary majority.

In a virulent attack against ARM chairman Malcolm Turnbull, Ms. Rayner said the ARM was contemptuous of the Australian people and only won places at the convention because their campaign was bankrolled by millionaires.

"We will not allow it to be railroaded by deals," she said. Ironically, the republicans' inability to present a united front has left monarchists in a strong position to decide which republican model the convention will recommend he put to a referendum.

A compromise model devised by DPEG delegates, who number about 30, was rejected Monday in talks with the 27-strong ARM, prompting two high-profile republicans to threaten to vote for the monarchy rather than the ARM model Friday.

The compromise proposed nomination of presidential candidates by both public and parliament, selection of a shortlist of three by a two-thirds majority of parliament and presidential election by the people on general election day.

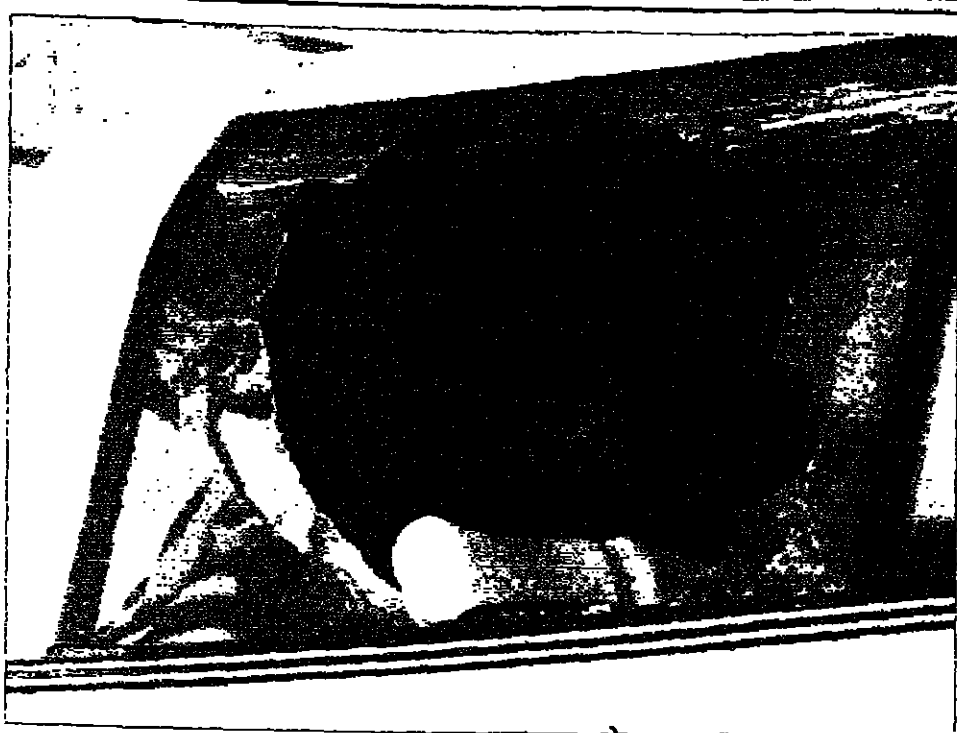
But DPEG spokesman Paul Tully said the talks broke down after 20 minutes and warned the split in republican ranks could spell the end of hopes for an Australian republic.

"Unless people can kiss and make up for Valentine's Day by the end of the week I suspect that the monarchists will win the final vote and there will be no referendum," Mr. Tully said.

"If we don't reach a deal within two days, I think the republic is doomed and unfortunately it will be on the head of Malcolm Turnbull."

The direct election advocates received a major boost Tuesday with the publication of a new poll by The Australian newspaper showing an overwhelming majority of Australians support a popular ballot.

The poll also found that while 56 per cent support severing links to Britain compared to 40 per cent who support retaining Queen Elizabeth as Australia's head of state, most would prefer to keep the queen rather than accept a republic that denied them a vote for president.



A policeman checks the scene of crime where a Kazakh man shot and killed two German customs officers at the Polish-German Goerlitz border crossing (Reuters photo)

Kazakh kills two German customs men at border

DRESDEN, Germany (R) — A Kazakh man shot dead two German customs officers early Tuesday during a routine inspection of a bus at the Polish-German border, authorities said Tuesday.

Two passengers were also wounded in the incident at the Goerlitz frontier crossing, about 100 km east of Dresden.

The suspected assailant was captured shortly after jumping out of a window and fleeing, a police spokesman said.

He added that he believed the passengers on the bus — on its way to Germany from Poland — came mainly from Russia, Ukraine, Poland and Latvia.

Heinz Schulze, chairman of the German Association of Customs Officials, said

that the shooting happened at 3:15 a.m. (0215 GMT). The assailant grabbed a pistol from the holster of one of the customs agents and shot them both at close range.

Mr. Schulze said one of the agents was killed immediately while the second died shortly afterwards despite emergency medical treatment at the site of the shooting.

He identified the two victims as Ralf Schulze, no relation to the chairman, and Thomas Haupt.

There were about 15 to 20 people in the bus, Mr. Schulze said. A group of border guards had already made an inspection of the bus without incident, he said. It was not known why the second inspection led to the shooting.

The border between Germany and Poland is considered to be one of the most dangerous of Germany's nine frontiers because of Eastern Europeans and refugees from around the world often try to slip over it to enter the prosperous European Union states.

There is also a considerable amount of smuggling, in particular of drugs and untaxed cigarettes as well as of third world refugees, across a border that is about 350 km long and is made up of the Oder and Neisse rivers.

"The dangers on the entire border are extremely high," Mr. Schulze said. "There is drug crime and the readiness to resort to violence is high."

The border crossing was now closed for traffic, police said.

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French police arrest more nationalists after Corsica murder

AJACCIO, Corsica (AFP) — French police arrested three more people linked to Corsica's nationalist groups Tuesday in connection with the assassination of the island's top official, investigators said.

Meanwhile French Prime Minister Lionel Jospin prepared to announce emergency measures in the National Assembly Tuesday afternoon.

A successor to the Mediterranean island's murdered prefect, Claude Erignac, will be named at a government cabinet meeting Wednesday.

Tuesday's arrests were made after police staged early morning raids in this Corsican capital and in the eastern coastal city of Bastia.

Police searched the home of the parents of nationalist Marcel Lorenzoni who was arrested Monday after detectives found arms and explosives at his home.

Tuesday, Lorenzoni, 51, was transferred to Paris, investigators said, adding he would probably be charged with explosives possession and that he

could not so far be linked with the killing.

Ten people arrested in a similar operation Monday were meanwhile still in custody at Ajaccio's main police station following Erignac's murder Friday.

Police are hunting five more suspects in connection with the killing of Erignac, who was shot in the back of the head while on his way to attend a concert.

Investigators said they had obtained detailed descriptions of the suspects from people willing to break Corsica's traditional "law of silence."

Two suspects picked up immediately after the killing were released overnight Monday, after being detained for the maximum three days without charge.

According to French press reports, police are investigating the theory that Erignac was the victim of a mafia killing linked to casino interests, rather than a killing linked to separatist causes.

Corsica has been hit by thousands of bombings

since the launch of a separatist movement in 1975 but there have been few murders of officials. The main victims have usually been militants of rival nationalist groups.

Tuesday Interior Minister Jean-Pierre Chevènement vowed to apply "the full rigours of the law" on the island, conceding that in the past successive French governments had been soft on nationalist-linked crime.

Flanked by Mr. Jospin, President Jacques Chirac said in Ajaccio Monday that France "will not tolerate" more violence and denounced mafia-style gangsterism.

At a ceremony watched by several thousands here, Mr. Chirac said that "murderous folly, the politics of provocation, mafia involvement" had motivated the killers against the state.

The press reports said Erignac had opposed two schemes involving casinos because of fears Italian mafia money might be involved.

Soon after taking up his post in Corsica in 1996, Erignac opposed a bid to

buy an old fortress in the southern town of Bonifacio that was to be turned into a hotel complex with a casino, the reports said.

Erignac also reportedly blocked a plan adopted by the Ajaccio city council to increase the number of slot-machines in the casino there on the grounds that Italian mafiosi could take a stake there.

A previously unknown group, claiming a separatist cause, has said it was responsible for the assassination.

In a three-page type-written claim of the murder sent to the local press, the unknown group said: "The action we are claiming today was perfectly thought-out and highly political."

Erignac's murder came two weeks after one separatist group, the FLNC-Historic Wing, announced an end to a seven-month ceasefire.

In a statement, the group denied any involvement in the shooting and its political wing, A Cuncolia Nazionalista, also condemned the shooting.

Diana's mother attacks claims she could have lived

LONDON (R) — The mother of Princess Diana Tuesday attacked claims that her daughter could have survived the horrific Paris car crash had she been taken to hospital quicker.

Frances Shand Kydd said she was convinced that Diana could not have pulled through given her injuries and said allegations in a new American book "Death of a Princess" lacked justification and credibility.

"I have full knowledge of Diana's injuries. I know that, without any room for doubt, they were unsurvivable," Ms. Shand Kydd was quoted as telling the Daily Express Newspaper. "I repeat that the med-

ical staff in Paris did everything they could and in the light of these claims I plan to contact them and restate my position," she added.

Ms. Shand Kydd's remarks reflected anger in Britain at the way in which Diana's last hours were being raked over in a way that could only distress her two teenage sons and other members of her family.

Time Magazine journalists Tom Sananton and Scott Macleod claim in their book that Diana might have lived had French medical workers taken her to hospital rather than treat her at length at the accident scene.

Diana's ex-husband Prince Charles is reported to be anxious about the delay in completing the official French investigation into the Aug. 31 accident, which also killed the princess's lover Dodi Fayed.

The Times newspaper Tuesday quoted a royal official as saying the prince wanted the matter resolved quickly.

"We want the uncertainty taken out of the equation. People forget how hurtful the speculation is. With the boys' interests in mind, we have made clear we want no delays in bringing this to a conclusion sooner rather than later," the official was quoted as saying.

France's health minister has dismissed the claims in the U.S. book, saying that the French policy of "taking the hospital to the patient" — rushing to the scene an ambulance equipped for sophisticated first aid treatment rather than transferring the patient to hospital — had been widely adopted around the world.

British Doctor Frank Cross, a trauma specialist at London's Royal Free Hospital, praised the French emergency system and condemned the claims in the book.

"It's damaging retrospective speculation which can only cause further distress to the relatives," Dr. Cross told ITN television news.

French ex-Foreign Minister Schumann dies

PARIS (R) — French former Foreign Minister Maurice Schumann, a founding father of the European Union, died Tuesday. He was 86.

A spokeswoman for the Senate said Schumann, a member of the Upper House, died in hospital.

Schumann, a journalist by trade, was spokesman for General Charles de Gaulle's London-based free French resistance movement during World War II.

Elected to the National Assembly in successive post-war elections, he was deputy foreign minister from 1951 to 1954 and president of parliament's foreign affairs committee for most of the period from 1957 to 1968.

He gained full ministerial rank after de Gaulle returned to power in 1958, holding such posts as minister for scientific research and later for social affairs.

He was appointed foreign minister in 1969 under President Georges Pompidou, a post he held until 1973, devoting much of his time to European affairs and playing a leading role in the development of the European common market.

Kidnap threat against staff of downed Philippine airliner

MANILA (AFP) — The military has provided armed security to officials of an airline involved in a southern Philippines crash after angry relatives of the victims allegedly threatened to kidnap them, an official said Tuesday.

The government has had difficulty retrieving the bodies because the crash site, on a mountain, is difficult to reach even by helicopter.

In addition, only mangled body parts have been found scattered all over the site, making it difficult to identify them.

The station said the Cebu Pacific offices at Lumbia airport in the southern city of Cagayan de Oro, where bodies are being processed by forensic experts and the hotel where airline staff involved in recovery efforts are quartered, are being provided extra military bodyguards.

Aviation officials there said six victims have so far been identified by the international team of experts, and the body of one local resident was already claimed by relatives.

They said the mangled remains of the victims which have so far been recovered from the jungle crash site and taken to the airport filled 81 body bags.

The 31-year-old jet's flight data recorder was recovered from the crash site Sunday and flown to Canada Monday for analysis, which investigators said could take at least a week.

Search teams Tuesday resumed the search for the plane's cockpit voice recorder and the remains of other victims.

increase the security we have at the airport," he said in an interview aired over GMA television here.

The relatives were reportedly angry at the slow pace of the recovery and identification of the bodies.

The government has had difficulty retrieving the bodies because the crash site, on a mountain, is difficult to reach even by helicopter.

The Cebu Pacific Air DC-9 jet slammed into the side of the Sumagaya mountain on a domestic route on Feb. 2, killing all 104 people on board.

"We just received a very broad, but not really detailed report about it (the kidnap threat)," said army Brigadier General Santos Gabison, one of the officials involved in recovery of the bodies and the wreckage of Flight 387.

"I have directed the military intelligence and some other members of the intelligence and security groups to

increase the security we have at the airport," he said in an interview aired over GMA television here.

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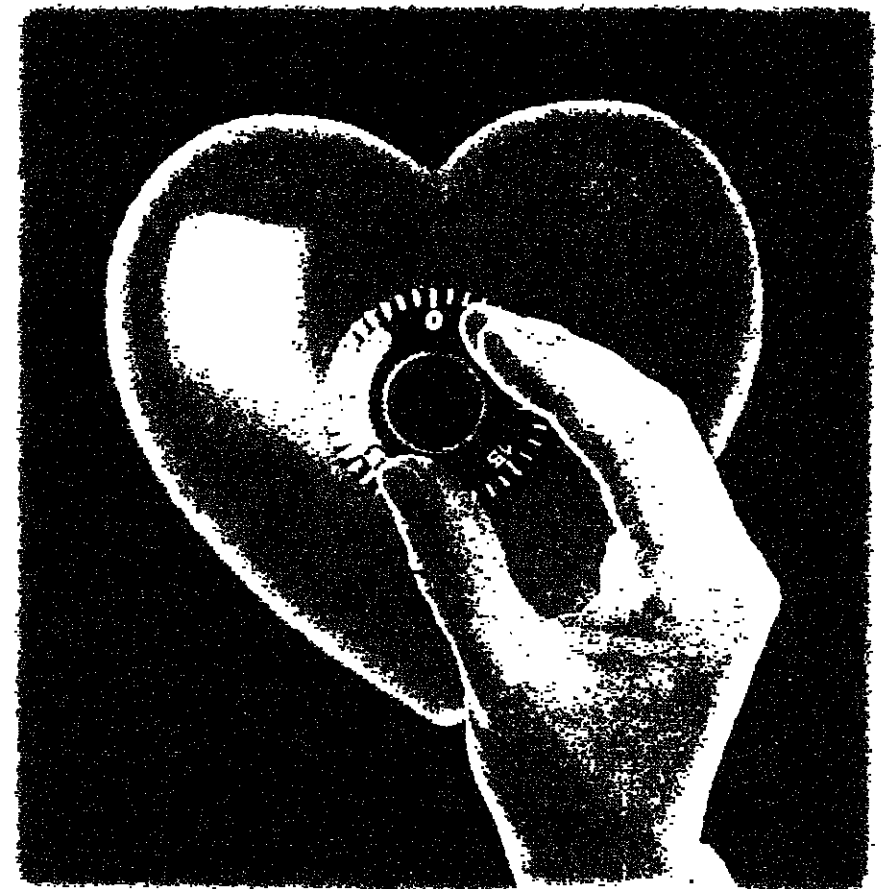
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Stage calls for credibility

A NEW round of peace talks between the Palestinians and Israelis has begun Monday under the auspices of the U.S. in Washington amid reports that President Bill Clinton's administration is too occupied with the Iraqi conflict to lend meaningful support for these negotiations. Many deadlines for achieving a breakthrough in the stalled talks have passed without seeing as much as a glimmer of hope that the Middle East peace process can get back on track. We would have thought and hoped that the U.S. could be half as firm with Israel as it has been lately with Iraq over the need to respect U.N. Security Council resolutions and the Jewish state's own commitments under peace accords. But, unfortunately, it appears as though the new round of talks in Washington is aimed mainly at deflecting attention from the American iron fist being directed against Iraq these days.

At a time when the U.S. and the U.K. are demanding that the Arab World side with them for the purpose of implementing Security Council resolutions on Iraq, both powers have yet to demonstrate equal or parallel zeal in favour of U.N. decisions pertaining to the Arab-Israeli conflict. President Clinton's and Prime Minister Tony Blair's apparent desire to uphold international legitimacy could be much more appreciated if they were to support and propagate an evenhanded policy towards all conflicts and disputes in this and other parts of the world.

It is sad to see the Palestinians being literally abandoned to their own fate when the attention is solely focused on what Saddam Hussein is doing in Iraq. Israel has a bag full of excuses to drag its feet and is ready to pull one pretext after another at every juncture to stall negotiations with the Palestinians. Yet, in this feverish atmosphere over the situation in the Gulf, very few people will be able to see straight when the Palestinian negotiating team returns empty-handed from the new Washington round.

Should this prediction prove false and the U.S. demonstrate that it is willing and able to follow through with its own plan for moving the talks forward, its leadership role in the Gulf and elsewhere stands to be better understood and appreciated by more Arabs. The current Palestinian-Israeli round in Washington offers, therefore, a unique opportunity for the U.S. administration to show fairness and seriousness in dealing with the Middle Eastern problems. This is not so much a test for U.S. credibility. It should be seen as an opening that might or might not be used to propel forward the cause of regional peace and stability.

ARABIC PRESS COMMENTARIES

Al Ra'i's Mahmoud Rimawi paid tribute to Arab League Secretary General Esmat Abdul Meguid, who, he said, is playing a constructive role to ward off a military strike against Iraq. Abdul Meguid, who visited Baghdad, has succeeded in securing the release of all Arab prisoners in Iraqi jails, and this is one small step towards reconciling Iraq with the rest of the Arab World, said the writer. But what is important, according to Rimawi, is that Abdul Meguid has revived the Arab summit institution when, upon directives from the head of the Arab summit, Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak, has acted on behalf of all Arab states in dealing with the Iraq-U.N. crisis making it clear to the Americans that the Arab states oppose any military strike. Abdul Meguid's mission to Baghdad reflected the desire of all Arab states, and therefore the time has come for the Arab League to assume the role of negotiating with the U.N. on behalf of Iraq, Rimawi suggested. The situation in 1998 is different from that which prevailed in 1991 when most Arabs were aligned against Baghdad for occupying Kuwait, the writer said. He said such a move would make it difficult for the U.S. to pursue its aggression since the Arab League which provided cover for the U.S. aggression in 1991 adopts a totally different stand in 1998.

Al Arab Al Yawm's Hilmi Al Asmar accused the U.S. of preparing for a new crusade against the Arab and Muslim nations. The threats of use of force against Iraq are intended first to intimidate these countries, forcing their subjugation, and in the event of a military strike against Iraq the whole region will be in turmoil, he said. The writer said the Clinton war is directed against all the Arab people directly and the Muslims at large. The Arabs should stop repeating Clinton's demand that Iraq has to implement all U.N. resolutions because Clinton aims to destroy the Arab might and the Arab economy by devastating Iraq, warned the writer. After humiliating the Arabs and stripping them of their military power, the Americans will have secured Israel's domination of the whole Arab region, he continued. But he said should the U.S. commit aggression, it must realise that its action would signal the long-awaited Arab-Islamic awakening and an all-out uprising by the Arabs and Muslims in the face of the aggression. The writer said Washington should remember that the Orient has always been a graveyard for all crusaders and invaders. He said the Arabs should realise that it is not only Iraq that is being targeted this time but rather the whole Arab World, where many regimes seek to achieve their own selfish goals at the expense of the masses.

Washington Watch

U.S. debates confrontation with Iraq

By Dr. James J. Zogby

FOR SEVERAL weeks now, the drums of war have been beating in the United States. It appeared inevitable that if the Iraqi government continued to refuse unconditional and unrestricted UNSCOM inspections, that country would be subjected to "massive and sustained" bombardment.

This view was fed not only by repeated ultimatums and pronouncements by various administration leaders and spokespersons, but also on the opinion pages of the U.S. dailies.

As late as two weeks ago, the only debate apparent in the U.S. media was between those who argued that air power was sufficient to "do the job" and those who argued that such strikes must be followed by an invasion of ground forces. This was the logical outcome of a discourse that had been largely limited to either right-wing ideologues or military analysts.

In some instances, the public discussion had become not only dangerous but also dangerously ridiculous.

A group of 18 conservatives, for example, have been arguing for the president to send in divisions of ground forces to invade, and presumably, to occupy Iraq. And Republican Speaker of the House Newt Gingrich, last week stated that if the Iraqi leader refused to agree with unlimited U.N. inspections "we will have to replace him with a regime that will."

It is ironic that while many of these same so-called analysts reject the notion of assassinating Saddam Hussein on the grounds that such an act would be illegal (there is a U.S. law that forbids the assassination of foreign leaders) and immoral ("not in keeping with our ethical standards") they, nevertheless, support the "massive and sustained" use of aerial bombardments of the country and the possibility of invasion by ground forces.

It is precisely this one-sided discussion of military options without any consideration for the political — or civilian — consequences that has caused more thoughtful analysts to react in the past few weeks.

Some, both on the right and the left, have begun to challenge the narrow apolitical views that have dominated the debate up until now. Questions have been posed of those who encourage the military option:

• What will be the outcome of a military strike? Will it change the political situation within Iraq? Will it make the regime more compliant of U.N. inspections — or will it harden the regime's resolve?

• If a ground invasion occurs, what next? How will a unilateral U.S. invasion of Iraq be viewed in Iraq or in the broader region? How long would the United States sustain an occupation force; what could it accomplish, and for how long would U.S. public opinion support such a

move? • What would be the political consequences of either a bombardment or occupation? How would Arab and Muslim public opinion, not to speak of world opinion, react to the civilian casualties resulting from such actions? What would the impact be on U.S. allies and interests in the broader Middle East? On stability and security? On the already fatally wounded Middle East peace process?

In addition to these new questions being asked, somewhat belatedly, traditional and not so traditional opponents of war have begun to mobilise. Peace Action, the nation's largest mainstream coalition of religious and peace organisations, has called for demonstrations. Some members of Congress and the Senate support them. And, a number of influential Republicans, former officials of the Nixon and Reagan administrations have also begun to speak out urging caution and calling for a new policy towards Iraq. John McLaughlin, for example, a former Republican White House official and now host of two popular and influential public affairs television programmes, has, for a number of weeks now, been challenging the tenets of the current debate as "immoral" and "dangerous."

Last week, in an effort to further broaden this developing debate, I led a delegation of Arab American leaders to a White House meeting with National Security Advisor Samuel Berger. We presented to the White House a consensus Arab American view that "the negative consequences of a military confrontation at this time would be to inflict greater suffering on the Iraqi people and to damage U.S. allies and interests in the Middle East... In addition, bombing Iraq will create tension and instability in the region and may prove fatal to the Middle East peace process. For these reasons and because there is no certainty that the military option would generate compliance with U.N. resolutions or produce political change in Iraq, we feel the military option is totally unacceptable." We made it clear that "as Arab Americans, we support the elimination of weapons of mass destruction throughout the entire Middle East, and we also support the enforcement of all U.N. resolutions that apply to the Middle East. We are concerned U.S. credibility is at risk in the region and that the United States is viewed as applying a double standard in the Middle East." Our position, we continued, was that "U.N. inspectors must be allowed to do their job. Instead of sustained bombing or an invasion of Iraq," we called for "diplomatic alternatives that put pressure on the Iraqi government to comply with inspections but do not negatively affect the civilian population of that country." We

noted that "we support U.N. Secretary General Kofi Annan's proposal to dramatically increase the U.N. oil-for-food programme. Economic sanctions have not had an impact on the Iraqi regime, they have only hurt the people of that country."

Our efforts received extensive national press exposure and generated a number of other national media appearances in the following days.

Helping to change the public debate is of critical importance, since it provides a more reasoned consideration of policy options. The danger of the one-sided debate is that it boxes the administration into a more limited set of options.

It is clear that the administration, while firm in its resolve to see that weapons inspections continue unrestricted, is somewhat uncomfortable with the narrower debate. Last week, Secretary of Defence William Cohen noted that there was no certainty that the military option would result in Iraqi compliance or be successful in ending the regime's development of weapons of mass destruction. Possibly in reaction to recent headline positions coming from Moscow, or as a result of the flurry of diplomatic activity being conducted by many U.S. allies, or even as a result of the less than conclusive results of Secretary of State Madeleine Albright's visits to European and Arab capitals, the U.S. position has more strongly than ever begun to affirm that it "prefers a diplomatic solution" to the stand-off with Iraq's leader.

The situation remains dangerous. To the same degree that Saddam Hussein remains, as I have previously argued, a "measure of the depth of alienation from the West" and, therefore, able to inflame extremist passions of those who are alienated and who feel betrayed, he also remains the "Willie Horton" of U.S. domestic politics. As such, any U.S. politician who appears to make concessions to the Iraqi leader will be buried under an avalanche of public criticism.

There is a frightening disconnect between the current debate in the United States and that in the Arab World, and most of the rest of the world.

It may yet be possible to avoid the devastating human and political consequences of a military confrontation. For that to occur, a diplomatic solution must be found that provides for the U.N. weapons inspectors to continue in a manner consistent with their mandate and for guidelines to be established, as described by one former Bush administration official, that will be both "firm and yet fair." At the same time, the U.S. policy debate must be opened up to allow for political acceptance of such for diplomatic resolution. Failure on either front could prove fatal to chances for a peaceful resolution.

Fear, hatred of Arabs still guiding U.S. foreign policy

By Edward Said

IT WOULD be a mistake, I think, to reduce what is happening between Iraq and the United States simply to an assertion of Arab will and sovereignty versus American imperialism, which undoubtedly plays a central role in all this. However misguided, Saddam Hussein's cleverness is not that he is splitting America from its allies (which he has not really succeeded in doing for any practical purpose) but that he is exploiting the astonishing clumsiness and failures of U.S. foreign policy.

Very few people, least of all Saddam Hussein himself, can be fooled into believing him to be the innocent victim of American bullying; most of what is happening to his unfortunate people who are undergoing the most dreadful and unacknowledged suffering is due in considerable degree to his callous cynicism — first of all, his indefensible and ruinous invasion of Kuwait, his persecution of the Kurds, his cruel egoism and pompous self-regard which persists in aggrandising himself and his regime at exorbitant and, in my opinion, totally unwarranted cost.

It is impossible for him to plead the case for national security and sovereignty now given his abysmal disregard of it in the case of Kuwait and Iran. Be that as it may, U.S. vindictiveness, whose sources I shall look at in a moment, has exacerbated the situation by imposing a regime of sanctions which, as Sandy Berger, the American National Security adviser has just said proudly, is unprecedented for its severity in the whole of world history. Around 567,000 Iraqi civilians have died since the Gulf War, mostly as a result of disease, malnutrition and deplorably poor medical care. Agriculture and industry are at a total standstill. This is unconscionable of course, and for this the brazen inhumanity of American policy-makers is also very largely to blame. But we must not forget that Saddam is feeding that inhumanity quite deliberately in order to dramatise the opposition between the U.S. and the rest of the Arab World: having provoked a crisis with the U.S. (or the U.N. dominated by the U.S.) he at first dramatised the unfairness of the sanctions. But by continuing it as he is now doing, the issue has changed and has become his non-compliance, and the terrible effects of the sanctions have been marginalised. Still the underlying causes of an Arab/U.S. crisis remain.

A careful analysis of that crisis is imperative. The U.S. has always opposed any sign of Arab nationalism or independence, partly for its own imperial reasons and partly because its unconditional support for Israel requires it to do so. Since the 1973 war, and despite the brief oil embargo, Arab policy up to and including the peace process has tried to circumvent or mitigate that hostility by appealing to the U.S. for help, by "good" behaviour, by willingness to make peace with Israel. Yet mere compliance with the U.S.' wishes can produce nothing except occasional words of American approbation for leaders who appear "moderate": Arab policy was never backed up with coordination, or collective pressure, or fully agreed upon goals. Instead each leader tried to make separate arrangements both with the U.S. and with Israel, none of which produced

very much except escalating demands and a constant refusal by the U.S. to exert any meaningful pressure on Israel. The more extreme Israeli policy becomes, the more likely the U.S. has been to support it. And the less respect it has for the large mass of Arab peoples whose future and well-being are mortgaged to illusory hopes embodied, for instance, in the Oslo accords.

Moral opprobrium is heaped on Arab states as it is on no others.

Moreover, a deep gulf separates Arab culture and civilisation on the one hand, from the United States on the other, and in the absence of any collective Arab information and cultural policy, the notion of an Arab people with traditions, cultures and identities of their own is simply inadmissible in the U.S. Arabs are dehumanised, they are seen as violent irrational terrorists always on the lookout for murder and bombing outrages. The only Arabs worth doing business with for the U.S. are compliant leaders, businessmen, military people whose arms purchases (the highest per capita in the world) are helping the American economy keep afloat. Beyond that there is no feeling at all, for instance, for the dreadful suffering of the Iraqi people whose identity and existence have simply been lost sight of in the present situation.

This morbid, obsessive fear and hatred of the Arabs has been a constant theme in U.S. foreign policy since World War II. In some way also, anything positive about the Arabs is seen in the U.S. as a threat to Israel. In this respect pro-Israeli American Jews, traditional Orientalists, and military hawks have played a devastating role. Moral opprobrium is heaped on Arab states as it is on no others. Turkey, for example, has been conducting a campaign against the Kurds for several years, yet nothing is heard about this in the U.S. Israel occupies territory illegally for 30 years, it violates the Geneva conventions at will, conducts invasions, terrorist attacks and assassinations against Arabs, and still, the U.S. vetoes every sanction against it in the U.N. Syria, Sudan, Libya, Iraq are classified as "rogue" states. Sanctions against them are far harsher than against any other countries in the history of U.S. foreign policy. And still the U.S. expects that its own foreign policy agenda ought to prevail (e.g., the woefully misguided Doha economic summit) despite its hostility to the collective Arab agenda.

In the case of Iraq a number of further extenuations make the U.S. even more repressive. Burning in the collective American unconscious is a puritanical zeal decreeing the sternest possible attitude towards anyone deemed to be an unregenerate sinner. This clearly guided American policy towards the native American Indians, who were first demonized, then portrayed as wasteful savages, then exterminated, their tiny remnant confined to reservations and concentration camps. This almost religious anger fuels a judgmental attitude that has no place at all in international politics, but for the United States it is a central tenet of its

worldwide behaviour.

Second, punishment is conceived in apocalyptic terms. During the Vietnam war a leading general advocated — and almost achieved — the goal of bombing the enemy into the stone age. The same view prevailed during the Gulf War in 1991. Sinners are meant to be condemned terminally, with the utmost cruelty regardless of whether or not they suffer the cruellest agonies. The notion of "justified" punishment for Iraq is now uppermost in the minds of most American consumers of news, and with that goes an almost orgasmic delight in the gathering power being summoned to confront Iraq in the Gulf.

Pictures of four (or is now five?) immense aircraft carriers steaming virtuously away punctuated breathless news bulletins about Saddam Hussein's defiance, and the impending crisis. The U.S. president announces that he is thinking not about the Gulf but about the 21st century: how can we tolerate Iraq's threat to use biological warfare even though (this is not mentioned) it is clear from the UNSCOM reports that he neither has the missile capacity, nor the chemical arms, nor the nuclear arsenal, nor in fact the anthrax bombs that he is alleged to be brandishing? Forgotten in all this is that the U.S. has all the terror weapons known to humankind, is the only country to have used a nuclear bomb on civilians, and as recently as seven years ago dropped 66,000 tonnes of bombs on Iraq. As the only country involved in this crisis that has never had to fight a war on its own soil, it is easy for the U.S. and its mostly brain-washed citizens to speak in apocalyptic terms. A report out of Australia on Sunday, November 16 suggests that Israel and the U.S. are thinking about a neutron bomb on Baghdad.

Certainly U.S. misuse of the sanctions to strip Iraq of everything, including any possibility for security is monstrously sadistic.

Unfortunately the dictates of raw power are very severe and, for a weak state like Iraq, overwhelming. Certainly U.S. misuse of the sanctions to strip Iraq of everything, including any possibility for security is monstrously sadistic. The so-called U.N. 661 Committee created to oversee the sanctions is composed of 15 member states (including the U.S.) each of which has a veto. Every time Iraq passes this committee a request to sell oil for medicines, trucks, meat, etc., any member of the committee can block these requests by saying that a given item may have military purposes (tyres, for example, or ambulances). In addition the U.S. and its clients — e.g., the unpleasant and racist Richard Butler, who says openly that Arabs have a different notion of truth than the rest of the world — have made it clear that even if Iraq is completely reduced militarily to the point where it is no longer a threat to its neighbours (which is now the case) the real goal of the sanctions is to topple Saddam

Hussein's government. In other words according to the Americans, very little that Iraq can do short of Saddam Hussein's resignation or death will produce a lifting of sanctions.

Finally, we should not for a moment forget that quite apart from its foreign policy interest, Iraq has now become a domestic American issue whose repercussions on issues unrelated to oil or the Gulf are very important. Bill Clinton's personal crises — the campaign-funding scandals, an impending trial for sexual harassment, his various legislative and domestic failures — require him to look strong, determined and "presidential" somewhere else, and where but in the Gulf against Iraq has he so ready-made a foreign devil to set off his blue-eyed strength to full advantage. Moreover, the increase in military expenditure for new investments in electronic "smart" weaponry, more sophisticated aircraft, mobile forces for the worldwide projection of American power are perfectly suited for display and use in the Gulf, where the likelihood of visible casualties (actually suffering Iraqi civilians) is extremely small, and where the new military technology can be put through its paces most attractively. For reasons that need restating here, the media is particularly happy to go along with the government in bringing home to domestic customers the wonderful excitement of American self-righteousness, the proud flag-waving, the "feel-good" sense that "we" are facing down a monstrous dictator. Far from analysis and calm reflection the media exists mainly to derive its mission from the government, not to produce a corrective or any dissent. The media, in short, is an extension of the war against Iraq.

The saddest aspect of the whole thing is that Iraqi civilians seem condemned to additional suffering and protracted agony. Neither their government nor that of the U.S. is inclined to ease the daily pressure on them, and the probability that only they will pay for the crisis is extremely high. At least — and it isn't very much — there seems to be no enthusiasm among Arab governments for American military action, but beyond that there is no coordinated Arab position, not even on the extremely grave humanitarian question. It is unfortunate that, according to the news, there is rising popular support for Saddam Hussein in the Arab World, as if the old lessons of defiance without real power have still not been learned.

Undoubtedly the U.S. has manipulated the U.N. to its own ends, a rather shameful exercise given at the same time that the Congress once again struck down a motion to pay a billion dollars in arrears to the world organisation. The major priority for Arabs, Europeans, Muslims and Americans is to push to the fore the issue of sanctions and the terrible suffering imposed on innocent Iraqi civilians. Taking the case to the International Court in the Hague strikes me as a perfectly viable possibility, but what is needed is a concerted will on behalf of Arabs who have suffered the U.S.' egregious blows for too long without an adequate response.

This article is reprinted from Al Ahrar Weekly.

Queen says Jordan supports IUCN's regional, culture-sensitive, decentralised approach to conservation

Following is the full text of Her Majesty Queen Noor's address to the IUCN-World Conservation Union regional forum in Amman on Tuesday.

Good morning, and to our guests from abroad, welcome to Amman. And perhaps the only place on earth where you won't hear complaints about El Niño — I hear they're blaming parking tickets on it now in Los Angeles.

We are particularly pleased to be hosting this regional conservation forum and to celebrate together the 50th anniversary of the IUCN, for Jordan's commitment to conservation is strong and its association with IUCN is long-standing and fruitful.

At 50, IUCN is one of the most dynamic international conservation organisations, and also one of the most comprehensive. With nearly 9,000 technical and policy experts in six global commissions, providing cutting edge information, the union shares the hands-on conservation experience of 895 institutions worldwide in an extensive "cross-fertilisation" of ideas.

IUCN leads the fight against the world's most pressing environmental problems. Some important achievements include the authoritative red list of threatened species, and contributing to the drafting of the world's major conservation treaties.

Moreover, IUCN's assistance over the years, in devising and implementing conservation strategies for governments, organisations and local communities, has done much to improve global awareness and action.

population rises; by 2025, it will be only 17 per cent of its level in 1960. Most aquifers are seriously overused; highland aquifer extraction is almost 80 per cent above natural recharge. Significant losses of water exist — 54 per cent in urban systems and 45 per cent in the Jordan Valley.

These are only two local examples of global problems. According to the 1997 World Water Forum of Scientists and Experts in Morocco, developing countries will need investments of up to \$1 billion to irrigate land and grow food to meet rising demands. Over the next 30 years, more than 60 per cent of the world's population will face water and food related problems.

Furthermore, both these problems, deforestation and water shortages, contribute to another crisis — desertification, which currently costs the world \$42 billion a year. The Roman empire's breadbasket in North Africa, which once contained 600 cities, is now a desert, and according to estimates by the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP), one quarter of the earth's land is facing the same fate.

Clearly, even if the direct impact of a problem is local, its political and demographic consequences are ultimately felt around the world, as mega-urbanisation, rural depopulation, emigration and other effects of dwindling resources make their presence felt.

But a simple local/global dichotomy doesn't take into account the importance of the more complex concept that brings us together today — regionalisation. The national boundaries of our region in particular are of quite recent origin; nomadic tribes once wandered freely

have divided up the area differently, for instance defining it by landmass and grouping North Africa with the rest of Africa, for our purposes this is the far more useful definition. Because the relationship between humans and the environment is symbiotic at best and parasitic at worst, environmental concerns are inextricably bound up with both ecosystems and cultural behaviour.

There can be no ecological change without

Working with the U.N. and the World Bank, Jordan pioneered the Azraq Oasis Project, one of the first in the world to attempt to restore an arid-zone wetland ecosystem, and we also completed a biodiversity study, the first step in fulfilling our obligations to the U.N. Convention on Biodiversity, which we ratified in 1993. According to the study, the Kingdom hosts a rich and unique variety of fauna and flora and is home to approximately 2,300 plant, 80 mam-

mal, 350 bird and 1,000 marine species!

Jordan has also taken advantage of new opportunities made possible by advances in the global marketplace. Of particular importance are debt-for-nature swaps, based on the idea that in the developing world, the debt crisis and environmental problems are interlinked.

In the first phase of these agreements, being brokered by the IUCN between Jordan's Ministry of Finance and various donors, the IUCN National Committee will decide which environmental projects will benefit from this aid. This is exactly the sort of creative environmental problem solving, drawing on expertise in areas as diverse as international finance, government and conservation NGOs, that makes me proud to be patron of IUCN.

With this new funding available, many new projects will no doubt follow in the successful vein of pioneering Jordan-IUCN programmes, such as the Dana Nature Reserve, which protects local biodiversity while simultaneously encouraging new income-generating activities in the local community. As our network of nature reserves expands, conservation-centred eco-tourism can benefit all the species in the area, human and animal, economically and ecologically.

Our experience and that of others in the region, indicates that the most effective conservation programmes draw on strengths from widely different types of organisations — international, governmental, non-governmental and local — the principle upon which IUCN is built.

The Jordanian National Committee of the IUCN, led so capably by Dr. Hatough, has been promoting region-wide initiatives for conservation, especially in setting up the regional committee that will include West and Central Asia and North Africa. Jordanian and Omani experts have been working together to save the endangered Arabian Oryx, and Jordanian experts will soon lead a joint programme with the Palestinian authorities to address other threats to the vital biodiversity of our region.

Regionalisation, at its best, is like a democracy of nations. Rather than having to sit by while the more powerful countries hand down decisions that affect the entire world, small

It is important to see the environment not as a luxury to be attended to after peace has been achieved, but as a key issue for regional stability.

taking into account the culture and traditions that give a region its character, many of which literally grew up out of the soil as the inhabitants learned how best to live in their surroundings.

IUCN makes a priority of such people-oriented policies; in fact, in its "world conservation strategy" IUCN originally coined the term "sustainable development" to emphasise that conservation is impossible without empowering regions to manage their own resources. This approach is actually far more consistent with the original meaning of "think globally, act locally" than a bumper sticker can express.

René Dubois, who coined the phrase in the 1970s, insisted that environmental issues could only be addressed in their "unique physical, climatic and cultural contexts."

Jordan fully supports this regional, culture-sensitive, decentralised approach. Our own environmental efforts date back to the mid-1960s with the founding of the first environmental society in the Arab World, the Royal Society for the Conservation of Nature. In the mid-seventies, IUCN helped this organisation plan 12 nature reserves, half of which have since been established, with others on the way. Inshallah.

Following on this pioneering work, non-governmental organisations (NGOs) have proliferated, especially in the last decade. These include such diverse groups as: Friends of Environment, who raise ecological awareness in schools and on the Internet; the Jordanian Society for Desertification Control and Badia Development, which transforms barren land into national parks; the Jordan Environment Society, which has a long track record in environmental education and has also tackled air pollution; and the Jordan Royal Ecological Diving Society (JREDS), which protects Akaba's marine life and coral reefs.

Conservation NGOs are also working closely with archaeological groups, with the help of government agencies, international organisations such as UNESCO, the private sector, and local communities, to protect not only our natural resources but also world-renowned historical sites such as Petra, which are an equally precious part of our environment.

Our government created a Ministry for Environmental Affairs in 1980 and in 1991 adopted the Middle East's first National Environmental Strategy, prepared by a team of Jordanian specialists with the invaluable help of IUCN. Jordan has participated in all global environmental conferences, including the Rio Earth Summit, and in 1996 we sent the second largest delegation to the IUCN World Conservation Congress in Montreal.

In the rush of new, worldwide priorities unleashed by globalisation, we must not forget that environmental issues and human rights issues are inextricably intertwined.

regional, and global. In conclusion, I thank everyone who has worked so hard to make this regional conference possible. The IUCN headquarters, the IUCN National Committee and its member associations, the Ministry of Municipal and Rural Affairs and the Environment, and all those who have contributed to ensuring the forum's success. And especially let me express our appreciation to Dr. Hatough and her steering committee for their untiring efforts. The best thanks we can give them is to use our time here well, so let me add only "good luck" and hand you over to the experts.

IUCN, led so capably by Dr. Hatough, has been promoting region-wide initiatives for conservation, especially in setting up the regional committee that will include West and Central Asia and North Africa. Jordanian and Omani experts have been working together to save the endangered Arabian Oryx, and Jordanian experts will soon lead a joint programme with the Palestinian authorities to address other threats to the vital biodiversity of our region.

Cohen welcomes 'real coalition' against Iraq; China warns against U.S. 'bullying'

(Continued from page 1)

leaders had "painted themselves in a corner and we need to work with them to get them to back down, but I think we should not insist on humiliating them."

Mr. Annan implied that the U.N. position could be flexible regarding resolutions demanding access for inspectors seeking to identify and eliminate Iraq's biological and chemical weapons facilities.

"I think we all need to think through very carefully the consequences of [military] action and what we do afterwards," Mr. Annan said. "If we maintain fundamentalist positions all around, or purist positions all around, we will not find a solution, and I appeal for that kind of courage, that kind of wisdom, that will allow us to make the kinds of judgements that will allow us to get out of this..."

Mr. Annan had cancelled a Mideast trip on Monday to concentrate on the negotiations at U.N. headquarters. He told the BBC it would be pointless to go without some idea of what both the United States and Iraq would agree to.

"I think we should do whatever we can to get a

diplomatic solution," Mr. Annan said. "I do not believe the hour for diplomacy has passed. But before I go to Baghdad I think we have to have an understanding with key players that they are likely to come up with a workable solution, and that we know what our minimum would be."

As Asia-Pacific nations on Tuesday took up opposing positions to the Gulf crisis, regional giant China warned against U.S. "bullying."

China, often at odds with U.S. policy in the Middle East, urged the United Nations not to be "bullied" by Washington. "At present there is still a possibility to solve this problem peacefully. We have stated in clear-cut terms we are not in favour of a military approach," Foreign Ministry spokesman Zhu Bangzao said.

"Instead of promoting cooperation between Iraq and U.N. [weapons] inspectors, the use of force will cause heavy casualties and aggravate regional tension. It will even trigger more serious conflict," he warned.

The China Daily said in an editorial Tuesday that Iraqi President Saddam Hussein "is targeted by the U.S. waving the sword of the U.N."

Chinese Assistant Foreign Minister Ji Peiding met Tuesday with ambassadors of seven Arab nations, including Iraq and members of the Gulf Cooperation Council, over the risk of a military escalation in Baghdad's standoff with U.N. weapons inspectors.

In Rome, Russia and Italy made a joint appeal Tuesday for a diplomatic solution to the Iraq crisis, while promising to put pressure on Baghdad.

The plea came on day two of President Boris Yeltsin's visit to Rome.

At a press conference, President Yeltsin and Italian Prime Minister Romano Prodi said they would send a "very strong" message to President Hussein, who has been refusing unrestricted access to U.N. arms inspectors.

"What is essential is that we avoid an inferno, that we do everything to peacefully resolve this conflict by way of diplomacy," the Russian president said.

Mr. Prodi said: "We are at a delicate moment for world peace."

Italy and Russia, he said, "must make their joint position known."

"I believe that our plea will not go unanswered," he said.

Russian Foreign Min-

istry spokesman Gennady Tarasov Tuesday issued fresh warnings to the United States about the possible results of air strikes against suspected stores of Iraqi weapons of mass destruction.

"We wonder consequently what may be the results of applying massive fire power against arsenals of mass destruction," he said.

Mr. Tarasov repeated Russia's stance on the conflict over U.N. weapons inspections, saying the country was "categorically opposed to the use of force" against Iraq.

He noted that Moscow was especially concerned about the likelihood of high civilian casualties as the result of a strike.

"Any military strike is a risky operation and the use of force often proves to be messy. The messy use of force would have many innocent victims," Mr. Tarasov said.

Meanwhile, in the Arab World, only Kuwait has said it will offer support in the event of a U.S.-led military operation, while Bahrain has signalled a readiness to assist and allowed the deployment of dozens of U.S. warplanes in November.

The United States is also to send five KC-10 tanker planes to Oman as

Time is running out for Iraq — Prince Hassan

(Continued from page 1)

extend its assistance.

Mr. Santer expressed hope that a peaceful solution to the Iraqi crisis be found and stressed that Iraq has to fully comply with United Nations resolutions or bear the consequences.

"Iraq has to comply with the U.N. resolutions, and we support all efforts at this moment given at a diplomatic level to find a solution," said President Santer following a meeting with Prime Minister Abdul Salam Majali.

The European official said the EU was concerned over the lack of progress in the Middle East peace process.

"We want to underline the importance we put on the peace process... We are concerned about the stalemate at this moment, and we also want to see how we can make some breakthrough," he said.

The EU is seeking a greater role in the 10-month stalled peace process. But Mr. Santer said Europe wants to play

a role that would complement that of the U.S. — the main sponsor of the Middle East peace process.

Palestinian-Israeli peace negotiations have been stalled for nearly a year, with Israel refusing to carry out promised troop withdrawals from more occupied lands.

"We want to see this peace process succeed on the basis of the Oslo agreements," said Mr. Santer adding that Israel's hard-line policies were affecting economic development throughout the region.

Israel last month rejected Palestinian demands that Europe be given a greater role in the peace process saying the government was too "pro-Arab."

Mr. Santer said the EC was the largest aid donor to the Palestinian National Authority, which received a total of \$1.8 billion in EC grants and loans since 1993.

"We are the biggest donor of aid to the PNA, and with this economic coopera-

tion, we also want complete results. That is the best guarantee for the security of Israel," Mr. Santer added.

President Santer praised Jordan-EU bilateral relations which he said "were strongly enhanced" after both sides signed an association agreement in Brussels in November last year.

The agreement which awaits ratification by the parliaments of the 15-member states and Jordan's Parliament, will provide the Kingdom with access to EU markets with the aim of creating a regional free trade area by the year 2010.

During his 24-hour visit to Jordan, President Santer met with Dr. Majali and other senior officials.

Mr. Santer will be heading today to Lebanon and Syria, ending a week-long visit to the region which also included Egypt, Israel and the Palestinian territories.

Havelange slams UEFA over FIFA presidency election

PARIS (AFP) — FIFA president Joao Havelange on Monday launched a scathing attack on UEFA and its president Lennart Johansson, who is bidding to succeed the Brazilian when his 24-year tenure ends in June.

The 81-year-old Havelange, who has stated his preference for FIFA secretary general Sepp Blatter to succeed him, also alleged that Germany were trying to take over world football by supporting Johansson's bid.

"The Latin countries should start taking on Germany's power game. Germany are seeking to dominate world football through the bias of UEFA and by getting their man elected to the presidency of FIFA, and that should not happen," Havelange said.

"Every federation, big and small, has the right to vote and to be heard. I will be very concerned for the future of football if certain people take hold of the reins," he added in an interview with France Football magazine.

Havelange also said he was appalled at the way UEFA had behaved in sending a letter to Blatter demanding he declare his candidature before the end of January, when the deadline is April 7.

"It would have been better if they had got in touch with me directly or with the FIFA executive committee before they delivered their ultimatum," Havelange said.

"Besides that the letter was just shabby as were all the attacks on Blatter in Ghent (where the Euro 2000 qualifying draw was made). Blatter asked me if he should reply and I said no. I would deal with it."

Havelange, who admitted he had written a reply but had

not sent it, said that although Johansson has asked for a face-to-face meeting with him he had not kept his appointment.

"We arranged to meet at the opening of the Stade de France, but I then learned that he (Johansson) had gone off to get a vaccination for his trip to the African Nations Cup," Havelange said.

Havelange, who said that Blatter's election would carry on the 'good work' they had done over the years, laid into the burly 68-year-old Johansson.

"His demands on Blatter are extraordinary. He has said if he is to be a candidate he has to immediately resign his post. Has Johansson?" Havelange asked.

"Hasn't he used his position as UEFA President to gain support? However, more serious is that he has said if he doesn't become FIFA President he will try and retain the UEFA spot. That is a joke!" he added.

Havelange also said that South Africa should be awarded the 2006 World Cup finals. There has been bitter confrontation between Germany and England — two other candidates — with claims that England broke a gentleman's agreement not to bid for the finals after Germany eased the way for them to host Euro '96.

"As the 2002 World Cup is being hosted in Asia (co-hosted by South Korea and Japan) then it appears logical that Africa should have the next one," Havelange said.

"South Africa has the attributes to host a World Cup, and it is important that the tournament is hosted by the different Confederations and not just by Europe," he added.

Wimbledon outplay Palace

LONDON (AFP) — The pressure increased on Crystal Palace boss Steve Coppell Monday night after his side slumped to a 3-0 English Premiership defeat against Wimbledon — the team which shares their Selhurst Park ground.

Carl Leaburn broke his Wimbledon duck by hitting two goals in a five-minute blitz in the second-half and Jason Euell added a scrambled third to leave Palace still searching for their first home league win of the season.

Ironically Palace's only win in the Premiership at Selhurst Park came as the 'away' team against Wimbledon.

Despite the defeat Coppell was adamant he had no intention of quitting his post.

"If Ron (Noades) thinks someone can do a better job then fine — but I won't be resigning," said Coppell.

"I thought at half-time that we had the edge and that things were looking alright. It's always a difficult game against Wimbledon but I thought in the first 45 minutes we just edged possession and chances although there were not many of those."

"But in 10 to 15 minutes of the second-half everything was forgotten. It was rank bad defending. Three crosses came in — three goals."

"You can't really legislate for defensive mistakes like that."

Coppell admitted that he was still desperately short of firepower.

"They had two centre-forwards on the bench and we were scraping around to get two centre-forwards on the pitch," he said.

"At the moment it's my only excuse or explanation. Marcus Bent has come in from Brentford and we are asking him to do a massive job up front. Without your strikers you are fairly impotent."

Wimbledon manager Joe Kinnear was delighted with the three points that takes his side clear of immediate danger and puts them within reach of ninth place if they win their game in hand.

Kinnear was particularly pleased with the performance of man of the match Michael Hughes and the contribution of goalscorer Carl Leaburn.

"Michael Hughes has been one of the pluses of the season and he gives us a different dimension," he said.

"I can play him almost anywhere and he has adapted to anything we have asked of him."

Referring to the Wimbledon win, he said: "Psychologically it's a real lift for us and a real downer for them. It's put us six points ahead of them and we have one all-important game in hand."

"We have done our goal difference the world of good and that's as good as a point later in the season."



Moroccan striker Bahja Ahmed (13) is blocked by Zambian Chongo Harrison (8) and chased by Zambian Mwape Sichone Moses (21) in their African Nations Cup match in Bobo-Dioulasso stadium February 7. Morocco won against Zambia 1-0 in the Group D (Reuters photo)

Ivory Coast coach tips South Africa against his own team

BOBO-DIOULASSO, Burkina Faso (AFP) — Ivory Coast coach Robert Nouzaret had no doubts South Africa were the favourites in their African Nations Cup group C clash on Wednesday afternoon.

"It's simple," said the Frenchman who has turned the team's fortunes round to guide them through the qualifying campaign.

"They are the holders so they are the favourites," he added.

Nouzaret did not mince his words when it came to his team's chances.

"I don't like making predictions, but South Africa on paper should win," Nouzaret said.

Despite their rousing 4-3 win over Namibia on Sunday, Nouzaret did not get carried away.

"Namibia flattered us a little and made defensive errors — I don't think it will be like that against South Africa," he said.

Admittedly South Africa did look very tidy at the back in their opening 0-0 draw against Angola although they failed to sparkle up front in a lethargic encounter.

Mark Fish looked comfortable and safe in

the middle of Bafana Bafana's defence, although he will have to take care from now on as he received a yellow card in just the seventh minute.

Striker Benni McCarthy also picked up a yellow card and midfielder John Moeti, sent off in the 87th minute against Angola, will have to sit out the match forcing coach Jono Sono to reshape his team.

Orlando Pirates' 24-year-old Dumisa Ngobe could take Moeti's place, and there are also injury doubts over McCarthy who has hurt his ankle, John Moshoeu who has a back complaint and striker Phil Masinga could be ruled out with a hamstring problem.

Meanwhile Ivory Coast's Bonaventure Kalou and Aliou Siby have also picked up one yellow card each in the 4-3 win over Namibia — both for dangerous play. Joel Tiehi, who has eight goals for Toulouse this season and scored twice against Namibia, is likely to start up front with Montpellier's Ibrahim Bakayoko who also scored against Namibia.

Impressive Ghana overcome Tunisia

OUAGADOUGOU (AFP) — Defender Mohamed Gargo scored in the final minute with a deflected shot to seal a 2-0 victory for Ghana over Tunisia in a high-profile African Nations Cup Group B match here Monday.

Alex Nyarko gave the four-time champions a 12th-minute lead at the August 4 Stadium by heading a Charles Akunnor free kick past goalkeeper Ali Boumnijel at the far post.

The Black Stars always looked probable victors with veteran Abedi 'Pele' Ayew overshadowing Zoubir Beya in midfield and the Dutch-coached team should have won more comfortably.

Italian-based Gargo wasted an excellent opportunity five minutes into the second half when he struck a penalty kick tamely and Boumnijel dived to hold the ball at the second attempt.

Zambia tie Morocco

Substitute Tenant Chilumba scored four minutes before the final whistle to earn Zambia a 1-1 draw with Morocco in the opening African Nations Cup Group D match Monday.

Veteran midfielder Kalusha Bwalya, back in the national team after an eight-month absence, set up the equaliser with a pass which Chilumba fired over goalkeeper Abdelkader al-Brazi into the corner.

The goal completed a brave second-half comeback by the country widely regarded as the best never to have won the biennial showpiece of African football.

Morocco dominated the opening half with ponytailed midfielder Mustapha Al-Hadji impressive and they came close several times before Ahmed Bahja scored a superb goal after 36 minutes.

A diagonal pass from Al-Hadji found the Saudi-based striker unmarked and as the Zambian defenders backed off he struck a right-foot shot over Davies Phiri into the net.

Abdeljalil Hadda had a volley superbly parried and struck the upright and Phiri bravely blocked a Youssef Chippo shot as Morocco showed why they are ranked No 1 in Africa.

They also displayed a less savoury side near half-time when Youssef Rossi was lucky to escape the attention of the Saudi Arabian referee after stamping on the foot of fallen Allan Kamwanga.



Democratic Republic of Congo Adolfa (R) fights for the ball with Togolese Kossi Noutsoudje during their Africa Cup of Nations match in Ouagadougou February 9. The Congo beat Togo 2-1 (Reuters photo)

SPORTS IN BRIEF

Fredericks to race in Australia

MELBOURNE (AFP) — Four-time Olympic silver medalist Frankie Fredericks was Tuesday confirmed to race at the two grand prix track meets in Australia later this month. The Namibian sprinter, who was second in world record time behind Donovan Bailey in the 100m and Michael Johnson in the 200m at Atlanta in 1996, will compete in the 200m races in Melbourne on February 25 and in Sydney on February 28. Bailey is also making the trip to Australia and will compete in both 100m races against reigning world champion Maurice Green and three-time Olympic finalist Dennis Mitchell. World 100m champion Marion Jones is scheduled to run in the 100m in Melbourne and 200m in Sydney.

Bremen appeal to be heard

BONN (AFP) — Werder Bremen formally protested to the German Football Federation (DFB) on Monday about the performance of the referee in their 4-1 loss Bundesliga loss to Bayer Leverkusen on Saturday. Werder have requested a rematch and the DFB is likely to hear the protest on Thursday and make a decision as soon as possible, although FIFA rules make a rematch almost impossible. Bremen were angered by the sending off of goalkeeper Oliver Reck late in the game. Referee Lutz Michael Froehlich showed him yellow and red cards and pointed to the dressing rooms, indicating that a foul was his second of the day, although Reck had not previously been cautioned. Froehlich later explained that he had made mistake and actually meant to show the Bremen player a red card for a professional foul outside the area after Reck felled a Leverkusen player in a race for a loose ball. The DFB has accepted a request by Froehlich to drop him from its list of Bundesliga referees for this weekend.

Weah on the way back

MILAN (AFP) — AC Milan's Liberian striker George Weah should soon be back in action, nearly three months after suffering a herniated disc. Weah played his first comeback practice game with the rest of the squad during Monday's club training session at Milanello. He could be available for the substitutes' bench on February 18, when Fabio Capello's men take on Parma in the first leg of the Italian Cup semi-finals.

Leaders Porto crash at Estrela

LISBON (AFP) — Runaway leaders FC Porto stayed ten points clear of closest rivals Benfica on top of the Portuguese first division Monday despite crashing to a shock 2-1 defeat away to Estrela Amadora.

NBA STANDINGS

By The Associated Press

Eastern Conference

Atlantic Division

	W	L	Pct	Gb
Miami	30	17	.638	-
New Jersey	27	21	.563	3 1-2
New York	25	21	.543	4 1-2
Washington	25	24	.510	6
Orlando	23	25	.479	7 1-2
Boston	22	25	.468	8
Philadelphia	14	31	.311	15

Central Division

	W	L	Pct	Gb
Indiana	33	13	.717	-
Chicago	34	15	.694	1-2
Charlotte	29	18	.617	4 1-2
Atlanta	29	20	.592	5 1-2
Cleveland	27	20	.574	6 1-2
Milwaukee	24	23	.511	9 1-2
Detroit	22	25	.468	11 1-2
Toronto	11	36	.234	22 1-2

Western Conference

Midwest Division

	W	L	Pct	Gb
San Antonio	34	14	.708	-
Utah	31	15	.674	2
Minnesota	26	20	.565	7
Houston	22	24	.478	11
Vancouver	13	36	.265	21 1-2
Dallas	9	38	.191	24 1-2
Denver	4	42	.087	29

Pacific Division

	W	L	Pct	Gb
Seattle	37	10	.787	-
L.A. Lakers	34	11	.756	2
Phoenix	31	15	.674	5 1-2
Portland	26	20	.565	10 1-2
Sacramento	20	28	.417	17 1-2
L.A. Clippers	11	37	.229	26 1-2
Golden State	8	37	.178	28

Beckenbauer — Africa not ready to stage World Cup

BONN (AFP) — The African continent is not yet ready to host the World Cup finals, Bayern Munich president Franz Beckenbauer said Monday.

"It is just impossible," Beckenbauer added. "There will be 32 countries with all their support staff and the press and the infrastructure is not in place."

ing body FIFA has to be realistic. "Africa is a genuine rival," he told Swiss magazine Sport, "but just not ready yet to host such a large event."

Beckenbauer said world govern-

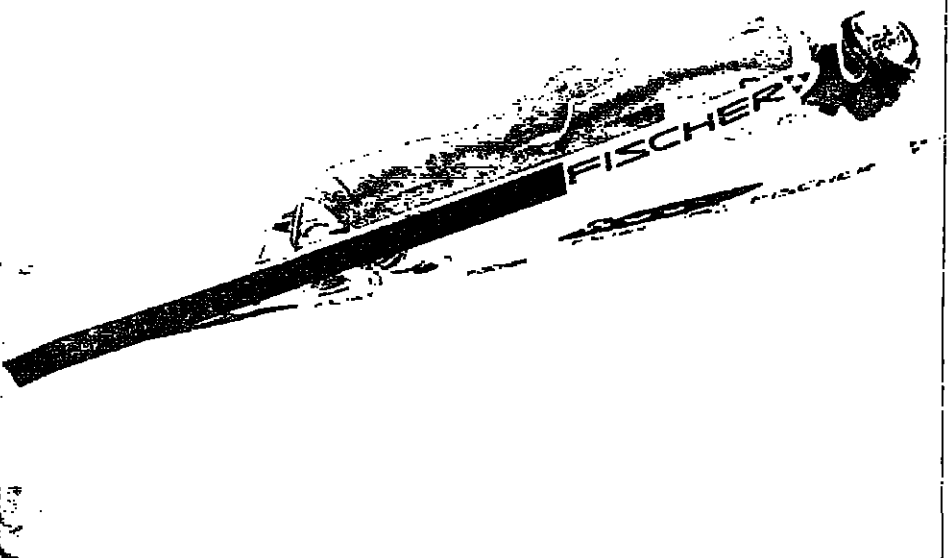
"Africa needs more time. Exactly how much I can't say."

In previous interviews Beckenbauer has warned that if England and Germany persist in staging rival bids for the 2006 event, a third, neutral country might be chosen, possibly from Africa.

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	Pierce Brosnan as James Bond 007...TOMORROW NEVER DIES Shows: 12:30, 3:30, 6:15, 8:30, 10:30	PINOCCHIO Shows: 12:30, 3:30 THE PEACEMAKER Shows: 6:15, 8:30, 10:30	Harrison Ford in AIR FORCE ONE Shows: 10:30, 8:30, 3:30, 12:30	Adel Imam & Yusra ... in RISALA ILA AL WALI (ARABIC) Shows: 12:30, 3:30, 6:00, 8:15, 10:30 MR. BEAN Shows: 3:30, 6:30, 8:30, 10:30	ABDOUN I KNOW WHAT YOU DID LAST SUMMER Shows: 3:30, 6:30, 8:30, 10:30 MORNING SHOWS 101 DALMATIANS	ABDOUN SEVEN YEARS IN TIBET Shows: 3:30, 6:30, 8:30, 10:45	NOW ON DAILY THE GOVERNMENT IN THE SERVICE OF PEOPLE Starring Hisham Yanes and Amal Dabbas For reservations call: 640155, 625155					



Chinese pairs skaters Shen Xue is thrown in the air by partner Zhao Hongbo as they skate during their long programme during the pairs figure skating competition at the Winter Olympics (Reuters photo)



Kazuyoshi Funaki of Japan soars down the hill during the third day of training for the K90 ski jump event February 10. The K90 jumping competition is scheduled to take place February 11 (Reuters photo)

Flu warning at Winter Olympics

NAGANO (AFP) — The International Olympic Committee (IOC) has warned competitors in the Nagano Winter Games against a flu hitting this Japanese Alps region.

IOC medical director Patrick Schamasch had given advice to be cautious, IOC media director Michele Verdier said.

"We should not sleep in too hot conditions. Turn off your heaters. That was his recommendation," Verdier said.

IOC medical commission president Prince Alexandre de Merode, battling a cold, was absent from the daily meeting.

Some 67,000 people — including a record 2,450 athletes from 72 countries, officials and media workers — are taking

part in the Games.

The IOC medical director did not say if any member of the Olympic had been affected by the flu which has struck 1,325 children and adults in the province of Nagano.

The flu is unrelated to the killer bird flu hitting southern China, Mikako Minamura of the Nagano municipal health office said. It causes high fever, pain in the joints and stomach ache.

Nagano Schedule for Wednesday, Feb. 11 (all times GMT)

- Curling (Karuzawa): Women's 4th preliminary round 0900/0000, Men's 4th preliminary round 1400/0500, Women's 5th preliminary round 1900/1000
- Alpine skiing (Shiga Kogen Yamanouchi): Men's combined slalom 0930/0030 and 1300/0400
- Ski jumping (Happo Hakuba): Individual K90 0930/0030
- Freestyle skiing (Iizuna Kogen): Moguls finals 1200/0300
- Ice hockey-women (Aqua Wing Nagano): Sweden v Canada 1200/0300, Japan v China 1600/0700, USA v Finland 2000/1100
- Biathlon (Nozawa Onsen): Men's 20km 1300/0400
- Luge (Iizuna Kogen): Women's solo 1400/0500
- Speed skating (M-Wave Nagano): Women's 3000m 1500/0600

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Shimizu meets expectations of nation, gets 1st Japanese gold

NAGANO (Agencies) — It was Japan's day at the Nagano Olympics on Tuesday when Hiroyasu Shimizu skated to the host country's first individual gold medal for 26 years.

The 23-year-old Shimizu, who lives in Nagano, also claimed Japan's first speed skating title while Jeremy Wotherspoon of Canada, seventh in Monday's first run when he almost fell, improved to win the silver ahead of team-mate Kevin Overland.

Japan's last individual Olympic gold medal was won by Yukio Kasaya in the ski jumping at the 1972 Sapporo Games, although Japan did win an Olympic team title in the 1994 Lillehammer Games in the Nordic Combined event of ski jumping and cross-country skiing.

Shimizu won the race with an Olympic record run round the M-Wave arena, where a capacity crowd of 10,000, including Crown Prince Naruhito and Princess Masako, cheered him on.

Waving two rising-sun flags, Shimizu earned the nation's fourth winter gold in history and broke the ice for other Japanese competitors who are expected to harvest a record number of medals for the host nation.

"Yes, there was tremendous pressure," Shimizu conceded. "About a week ago, I started to feel an uneasiness. I started to worry: 'what if I do not achieve what everyone expects?'"

Prime Minister Ryutaro Hashimoto called Shimizu after the medal ceremony. "When I told him it was more than I deserved to get a call from the prime minister, he said, 'gold medals have that kind of right,'" Shimizu said.

Newspapers immediately printed extra editions and television networks played and replayed his victorious sprint.

"The first great performance in Japanese skating history," said the Shinano Mainichi Shinbun under the banner headline "Shimizu gold."

Otherwise, on another day which saw a glamour Alpine



Prince Albert of Monaco (L) awards the gold medal to Karine Ruby of France at the medal ceremony in Nagano February 10. Ruby received the gold for her win in the women's snowboarding giant slalom competition (Reuters photo)

skiing event called off because of snow, the spotlight fell on Larissa Lazutina, a 32-year-old Russian mother competing in her third Olympics, and 20-year-old Karine Ruby making her Olympic debut.

Lazutina, who almost quit Nordic skiing last year, became the first competitor at these Games to win two medals while Ruby won a brand-new Olympic event.

Ruby, who won the first of her three world titles as a 17-year-old, claimed France's first gold medal since the 1992 Winter Games in Albertville, when she emphatically won the women's giant slalom snowboarding.

Lazutina, runner-up in in Sunday's 15km classical race, blasted through the Nordic ski women's 5km cross country. The triple world champion in 1995 finished almost five seconds faster than Katerina Neumannova of the Czech Republic, who competed in the mountain biking at the 1996 Atlanta Summer Games.

Bente Martinsen of Norway finished 11sec back to take the bronze medal.



Larissa Lazutina of Russia celebrates her gold medal win in the XVIII Winter Olympics. Lazutina won her medal in the women's five-km classic-style cross country skiing race (Reuters photo)

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Police capture possible Picasso originals smuggled into Kingdom

By Rana Hussein
Jordan Times Staff Reporter

AMMAN — Police have seized a collection of stolen paintings suspected of being the work of Spanish artist Picasso that were smuggled into Jordan for sale from a neighbouring country, a senior police official said on Tuesday.

The official said the paintings, believed to have been stolen from a Kuwaiti palace during the 1990-91 Gulf crisis, were referred to professional art experts to determine whether they were original works. If proven authentic, they could be worth \$40 million.

"A big possibility remains

that the paintings are fake because we have encountered similar cases in the past where people were trying to sell fake dollars, paintings, books, etc.," he told the Jordan Times.

He did not say how many paintings were seized, but said they were confiscated along with two stashes made of gold, each weighing over 10 kilograms.

The art objects were found in the possession of four Jordanians who were nabbed after the police were tipped off that they were looking for buyers to sell the Picasso paintings, he said.

"Police sent undercover agents who posed as buyers

and arrested the men," added the official, who requested anonymity.

The four have told interrogators that the paintings and statues were given to them by four Arab nationals to help them find buyers — especially tourists and Israeli art collectors.

"The paintings were reportedly stolen from one of the Kuwaiti palaces during the 1991 Gulf war by the four Arab nationals, who managed to smuggle them to Jordan," he said.

Iraq occupied Kuwait for seven months after its troops invaded the emirate in August 1990. Many valuable objects that were stolen from private

collections in Kuwaiti homes and palaces have found their way out to Western markets, mostly by Iraqi smugglers.

The official urged the public to be careful "and not to buy any artwork or ancient goods or money from individuals."

He also revealed that police recently apprehended two men who were trying to sell fake bills of U.S. dollars worth \$92,000 in the local market.

Pablo Ruiz Picasso, born in 1881, is famed for his complex and unpredictable work. He produced over 20,000 works of art — paintings, drawings, engravings, collages, sculptures and pottery — before dying in 1973.

Palestinian police clamp down on pro-Iraq protests

GAZA CITY (AFP) — The Palestinian National Authority (PNA) said Tuesday that it was clamping down on street demonstrations in the occupied territories after pro-Iraq rallies turned into violent, flag-burning protests against Israel and the United States.

"We issued an order yesterday banning all demonstrations that lead to violence and disturbances," said Ghazi Jabali, chief of the Palestinian police force.

"Anybody who wants to organise a demonstration has to have a permit, which will be issued on condition that there

will not be any flag burning and that protesters will stay away from Israeli roadblocks and not damage public property," he told AFP.

The move came a day after hundreds of Palestinians across the West Bank held pro-Iraq rallies at which demonstrators chanted "Death to America" and called on Iraqi President Saddam Hussein to fire missiles and chemical warheads on Israel.

The demonstrators burned makeshift Israeli and U.S. flags and clashed briefly with Israeli soldiers outside the city of Ramallah.

On Saturday more serious clashes between protesters and Israeli troops broke out in Bethlehem following a pro-Iraq rally. Israeli soldiers wounded a dozen Palestinians with rubber-coated bullets in the melee.

Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu was quick to portray the protests as another example of Palestinians' continuing hostility to Israel.

"The Palestinians have to decide whether they want to live in peace with Israel or support Saddam," he said.

U.N. approval pending as Russia cuts passenger list on Iraq plane

UNITED NATIONS (AFP) — U.N. approval for an Iraq-bound flight by a Russian plane was still awaited Tuesday after Russia agreed to remove all but 30 passengers from the aircraft, U.N. spokesman Fred Eckhard said Tuesday.

Mr. Eckhard said that the issue of the Iraq-bound plane, which has been stranded in the Armenian capital since Sunday awaiting U.N. approval, was "still pending in the Sanctions Committee."

However, he noted that Russia had submitted a list of passengers, which now had 30 names instead of the original 222. Mr. Eckhard said the passengers included seven deputies, 15 journalists and eight accompanying personnel.

A Russian diplomat told AFP that ultra-nationalist leader Vladimir Zhirinovskiy, was still on the passenger list.

11 killed, 19 captured in Chad hostage release

NDJAMENA (AFP) — Security forces killed 11 people and captured 19 when they carried out an operation to free four French nationals taken hostage in southern Chad, Defence Minister Oumar Kadjalimi disclosed Tuesday.

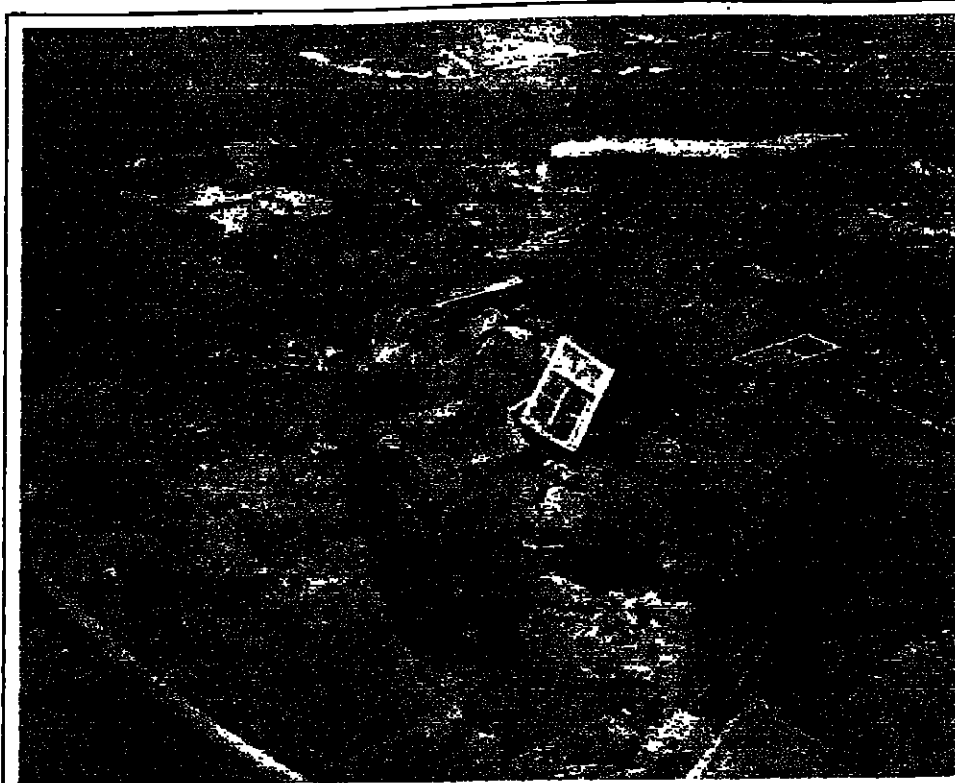
The four hostages, taken by an anti-government group calling itself the Union of Democratic Forces (UDF), were freed on Sunday after intervention by security forces and calls from Paris for maximum discretion in the operation.

Mr. Kadjalimi's statement was a first official account of casualties in the operation to free the four, who an authoritative source here earlier said would return to France on Tuesday night. The minister said that an aide to UDF leader Mahmoud Nahr, and several other accomplices were arrested during the sweep by security forces after the kidnapping last Tuesday by five armed men.

Chadian Communications Minister Haroun Kabadi for his part presented guns and medical equipment to the press, including syringes and sleeping drugs, which he said had been used by the kidnappers.

At the time, a Chadian park warden was reported to have been put to sleep and could only raise the alarm when he came around. He also displayed their identity cards and a political tract from an unrecognised party, the People's Democratic Front.

Marc Lutz, 26, who had been carrying out his French military service as a second game reserve worker, plus his brother and two friends, were freed by security forces on Sunday after being held for five days in a cave by the group in the southern Sahel region.



DEVASTATION IN AFGHANISTAN: Women in the village of Ghanj in northern Afghanistan walk through the debris of their houses on Tuesday. An international aid official said on Tuesday last week's earthquake had claimed about 4,200 lives and bad weather was hindering delivery of humanitarian aid to survivors (Reuters photo)

Euro MP remarks spark row during mission to Algeria

ALGERIA (AFP) — A European parliamentary delegation in Algeria found itself running a damage limitation exercise Tuesday, after Algerian newspapers slammed one of its members for urging a dialogue with the outlawed Islamic Salvation Front (FIS).

According to the reports, Daniel Cohn-Bendit of Germany's Greens Party, had insisted on a meeting with FIS deputy leader Ali Belhadj, and threatened to quit Algeria earlier than scheduled if he was barred from talking to people of his choice.

The newspapers accused Mr. Cohn-Bendit — remembered as one of the top student leaders during the May 1968 riots in Paris — of "play-acting" and labelled remarks he made about a tradition of violence in Algeria as "racist."

—The row forced the head of

the delegation, Frenchman Andre Soulier of the conservative European Popular Party, to distance the mission from Mr. Cohn-Bendit.

"This delegation was not informed of this proposal and does not endorse it," Mr. Soulier said, adding that he and the group's deputy leader, Hannes Swoboda of Austria, were its only official spokesmen.

The nine-member mission has been holding a series of sensitive talks with a cross-section of Algerian politicians, aimed at easing the sense of mutual suspicion inherent in current EU-Algerian ties.

"It is too early to speak of any results, we are still talking," Mr. Soulier said late Monday.

The Euro MPs are having to tread a fine line between voicing concerns over the current level of violence in Algeria,

while respecting the Algerian government's stiff opposition to any move that smacks of interference in its internal affairs.

In an apparent attempt to placate Algerian public opinion, Mr. Cohn-Bendit proposed on Monday that Strasbourg set up a special commission to investigate Algerian charges that some European countries shelter and support Islamists.

At the same time, another member of the delegation, Michel Scarbonchi, suggested the possible lifting of the 1992 EU embargo on the supply of anti-terrorist materials to Algeria.

In exchange, Europe would look for guarantees of greater transparency by the Algerian government over such controversial issues as human rights and the recent upsurge in civilian massacres.

Georgians suspect Russian hand in Shevardnadze assassination bid

TBILISI (AFP) — Georgia pointed the finger of suspicion at Russia Tuesday after a failed attempt on the life of Georgian President Eduard Shevardnadze, which officials said may have been linked to fierce rivalry over oil exports.

Georgian security forces launched a massive manhunt for the 10-15 men who opened fire on Mr. Shevardnadze's motorcade in the capital Tbilisi late Monday with grenades and machine-guns, in what officials said was a highly professional attack.

In an interview with Russian NTV Television, Mr. Shevardnadze accused Russia of protecting Georgians wanted for a previous attempt on his life in August 1995, including former security service chief, Igor Georgadze.

"The main question is: why is Russia still sheltering terrorists? Not just Georgadze, but three or four others who took part in that assassination attempt? I don't understand why," Mr. Shevardnadze said.

The 70-year-old Georgian leader, who was foreign minister under former Soviet President Mikhail Gorbachev, did not accuse Russia directly for Monday's attack, but said there were indications that it was organised by a powerful "third force" based outside Georgia.

"I know the capabilities of our structures. Even if they try to betray us they are incapable

of such skilled organisation," Mr. Shevardnadze said.

Earlier, he said the discovery of a foreign passport on the body of one of the assassins killed in the ambush spoke "volumes." Officials said the passport belonged to a Chechen living in Dagestan.

Besides the gunman, two presidential bodyguards were killed in the attack.

Mr. Shevardnadze did not rule out that it may have been linked to the fierce competition between Georgia and Russia over exports of oil from the Caspian Sea.

"Powerful forces have an interest in another solution to this question," he said, in a reference to the construction of a pipeline across Georgia which will compete directly with a Russian pipeline to the north.

Georgia's foreign ministry said the number of assassins involved "left no doubt that it was an act of international terrorism."

As Mr. Shevardnadze and deputies met in emergency session, police and interior ministry troops threw up checkpoints around Tbilisi, stopping all vehicles entering the city, and stepped up border controls.

Troops were also posted outside government and administrative buildings.

Georgian Security Minister

Djmal Gakhokidze, quoted by Interfax, said preliminary evidence proved that the attack "was organised by forces out-

side Georgia," although some Georgians also participated in it.

He said no suspects had been detained, but the assassins' "escape routes and means of transportation are already known."

Meanwhile, Russian Federal Security Service (FSB) chief, Nikolai Kovalev, offered Mr. Gakhokidze help in the investigation, Interfax reported.

Deputies demanded that interior ministry troops blockade Russian military bases in Georgia, suggesting the attackers had been sent from Russia and used a base at Vaziani, 30 kilometres from Tbilisi.

Some 18,000 Russian soldiers are stationed in Georgia at five military bases, including a peacekeeping force policing a ceasefire between Georgian troops and separatists in the northern secessionist region of Abkhazia on the Black Sea.

However, Mr. Shevardnadze told NTV he would not order any blockade of the Russian bases. "As long as I remain president I will not take such a decision," he said, Georgian security forces would enter the bases "if the investigation leads in that direction," he added.

Chechen Foreign Minister Movladi Udogov blamed the attack on "the long arm of Moscow," telling AFP in Grozny: "There's not a terrorist in the world who would take his identity papers with him on the way to an attack."

Clinton allies linked to Chinese intelligence

WASHINGTON (AFP) — Indonesian billionaire Mochtar Rindy, his son James, and four other financial supporters of President Bill Clinton have been tied to Chinese intelligence, The Washington Post said Tuesday.

Quoting a draft report on the Republican-controlled Senate's hearings last year on alleged campaign abuses, the daily said Vice President Al Gore "was well aware" that a 1996 event at a Los Angeles Buddhist temple he attended "was designed to raise money for his [Democratic] party."

The event was also linked to long-time Democratic fund-raiser

Marisa Hsia, one of the six people the report accuses of having ties with Chinese intelligence. Ms. Hsia, in the 1,500-page report, is described as "an agent of the Chinese government."

The Post's double, front-page scoop is likely to compound Mr. Clinton's legal headaches — adding to the simmering sex-and-lies allegations against him — and may harm Mr. Gore's presidential run in 2000.

On the other hand, the report could also give more credence to First Lady Hillary Rodham Clinton's charges two weeks ago that a right-wing conspiracy was trying to demolish her husband

politically.

The report begins by asserting that in the 1996 presidential campaign, Mr. Clinton, Mr. Gore and their top aides conducted a well-coordinated and highly successful effort "to violate the letter and spirit of existing federal campaign laws" banning donations from foreign individuals and businesses.

The report was drawn up by the Senate Governmental Affairs Committee which from July to October of last year conducted hearings into alleged campaign fund-raising abuses by the Democrats and influence-buying by the Chinese government.

Pope, Clinton and Michael Jackson vie for Nobel Peace Prize

OSLO (AFP) — Pope John Paul II and Bill Clinton have been nominated for the 1998 Nobel Peace Prize — along with Michael Jackson, the Norwegian NTB news agency reported Tuesday. It said 130 nominations have been received so far by the Nobel organising committee. That already beats last year's record of 129. The list of nominations is not made public, but several are already known. Three Norwegian deputies have said they have put forward Clinton's name. NTB said the Pope, Jimmy Carter, Chinese dissident Wei Jingsheng and Richard Holbrooke regularly appear on the list. NTB said Michael Jackson had also been nominated, but did not say by whom.

'Titanic' hauls in record number of Oscar nominations

LOS ANGELES (AFP) — "Titanic," the costliest movie ever, hauled in a massive 14 Oscar nominations, the most for any film since 1951. It was nominated by the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences in the major categories of best picture, best director (James Cameron), best actress (Kate Winslet) and best supporting actress (Gloria Stuart). The last time a movie took as many nominations was in 1951 with "All About Eve."

Jack Nicholson nominated for best actor — again

LOS ANGELES (AFP) — Jack Nicholson has something to boast about, again. With his comic portrayal of a writer with an obsessive compulsive disorder in "As Good as It Gets," the 60-year-old star can boast the highest number of Oscar nominations for best actor. He surpasses Laurence Olivier, who had 10. Nicholson hasn't done it quite yet, of course. To win the Academy Award at the glittering March 23 ceremony here, he has to ward off the likes of Robert Duvall, Matt Damon, Peter Fonda and Dustin Hoffman.

'Batman and Robin' nominated for a 11 Raspberries

LOS ANGELES (AFP) — "Batman and Robin" heads the list of nominated films for the somewhat less-than-prestigious 18th Golden Raspberry Awards for the worst film of 1997. In all, the movie on the dynamic crime-fighting duo garnered 11 Raspberry nominations, including that of worst director for Joel Schumacher. The awards will be dished out on March 22, on the eve of the Raspberry's rather more serious sister event, the Oscars. Golden Raspberry founder John Wilson said he expected the turnout at his ceremony to be pretty much the same as in the past — with few if any of the nominees present.

Rat grounds Swissair Airbus at Zurich

ZURICH (AFP) — A rat that climbed aboard a Swissair plane, forcing the aircraft to be grounded two days, has finally been trapped in business class. The rodent was seen hopping into the A319 Airbus early Sunday, just as the human passengers were supposed to be boarding for the scheduled flight to Vienna. While staff chased the rat, passengers were transferred to another plane. Eventually the animal was caught in a trap, a spokesman for Swissair said Tuesday. Rodents are forbidden to fly for safety reasons as they might chop a few wires and also because "with a high service reputation we don't like animals on board," the spokesman said.

Egyptian health minister criticises Islamists over female circumcision

CAIRO (AFP) — Egyptian Health Minister Ismail Sallam attacked Muslim fundamentalists here for criticising the country's ban on female circumcision.

During a seminar at the Cairo Book Fair Monday night in which he laid out his health programme, the minister was regularly interrupted by Islamists who chanted "You are violating Islamic law," "You are attacking Islam."

An angry Sallam retorted: "Growing a beard doesn't give you the right to issue religious decrees. It's the mufti's prerogative and he said that female circumcision is not a religious duty."

Male Islamists sport beards

while the women cover their hair.

Mr. Sallam said: "We must protect poor and peasant girls because we know that the wealthy, officials, and senior clerics don't circumcise their own," he added.

"I asked one cleric who told me he hasn't had any of his five daughters circumcised. We know that the State Council's decision won't immediately stop female circumcision, but it is a step in the right direction toward protecting women," he added.

The State Council, the country's highest administrative body, ruled female circumcision illegal Dec. 28 after throwing out a lower court ruling last summer which overturned the health

ministry's ban on the practice.

The State Council said: "Circumcision of girls is not an individual right under Islamic law because there is nothing in the Koran which authorises it and nothing in the Sunna," traditional accounts of how the Prophet Muhammad lived his life.

The court ruled that "henceforth, it is illegal for anyone to carry out circumcision operations, even if the girl or her parents agree to it."

In the age-old operation, all or part of the clitoris and sometimes the labia are removed, with the aim of removing a woman's sexual desire.

Offenders may be sentenced to up to three years in prison.